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Iraqis appeal for end to sanctions

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Iraqi Christian leaders urged the United Nations to lift crippling sanctions on Baghdad in a special Christmas appeal published here on Saturday. "Celebrations are taking place, but instead of smiles, people's faces are covered in tears because of the unjust embargo imposed on our people," said Archbishop Avak Assadourian, leader of the Armenian Orthodox community, in a Christmas article published in Al Iraq newspaper. Arch. Assadourian said the U.N. sanctions — imposed after Iraq's August 1990 invasion of Kuwait — were aimed at breaking Iraq's refusal "to submit to the great powers." Father Thomas Marco of the Chaldean Catholic Church, Iraq's biggest Christian community, urged those behind the embargo to "be inspired by the meaning of this great festival and shed their blindness" by ordering a lifting of sanctions. The head of the Syrian Catholics, Monsignor Sorios Hawa, appealed to "good men to raise their voices in calling for recognition of the Iraqis' legitimate right to live freely and benefit from the resources which God generously lavished on them."

Merry Christmas

The Jordan Times will not be published on Monday, Dec. 26, due to the Christmas holiday on Sunday. The next issue of the paper will appear on Tuesday, Dec. 27. The editor and staff of the Jordan Times wish the paper's readers and advertisers a Merry Christmas.

French airliner seized in Algiers

PARIS (R) — Four gunmen disguised as airport workers seized a French airliner with 283 people aboard on the tarmac at Algiers airport on Saturday, Paris airport sources said.

The sources said the gunmen mixed with tarmac crew before pulling out weapons, physically blocking the takeoff of the Airbus 300 and boarding the plane which had been preparing to fly to Paris.

Early reports said three gunmen had boarded the plane parked at the end of a runway at Algiers' Houari Boumediene Airport but the airline and Algerian officials later put their number at four.

The identity of the armed men, their possible membership of an organised group or the type of weapons possibly in their possession were not immediately known, nor were their motives.

The plane was about 300 metres from the terminal and fire-engines were parked nearby.

Later the gunmen released 42 people in batches, including 29 women, seven children and six men. All flights in and out of the Algerian capital were cancelled. Police cleared the airport terminal of passengers and other civilians.

Commentators said that the hijackers could be Islamic fundamentalist guerrillas, who have targetted foreigners since Algeria began sinking into turmoil three years ago.

Most of the 271 passengers who had boarded the plane were Algerian. There were some 10 French nationals on the plane, including two diplomats, plus 12 French crew.

Air France said the gunmen went into action as passengers boarded the plane and physically prevented it from moving, presumably by standing in front with weapons levelled.

They later boarded the aircraft, which was now surrounded by Algerian police and firefighters, airline officials said.

The official Algerie Presse Service (APS) news agency reported from Algiers that Interior Minister Abdul Rahman Meziane Cherif had gone to the airport with the head of national security to deal personally with the situation.

At least 10,000 people have been killed in the civil violence which has racked Algeria since January 1992, when the authorities cancelled general elections in which the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had taken a commanding lead.

Foreigners have been targetted by the Islamic Salvation Army, the armed wing of FIS, which seeks to turn Algeria into an Islamic republic.

Flight of 8969 had been due to take off at 11.15 a.m. (1015 GMT) and arrive in the French capital two hours later.

Authorities at Orly airport south of Paris assembled tearful relatives of Algerian passengers in a special hall. They later advised them to go home and wait for news from the airline by telephone.

French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur said in a television interview that France would do all it could to secure the release of the hostages.

The last Algerian hijack occurred last month when three Algerians forced an Algerian airliner to fly to Majorca before surrendering to Spanish police.

They had been armed with a knife and a coffee grinder which they said was a bomb.

Those hijackers had demanded the release of all political prisoners in Algeria, a reopening of the aborted 1992 elections, and fuel to fly [illegible]

Lower House begins debate of 1995 budget

Finance Committee presents its recommendations in all sectors

By P.V. Vivekanand
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — The Lower House of Parliament on Saturday began formal debate of the draft fiscal budget for 1995, with the approval of the budget a virtual certainty when it is expected to be put to vote on Monday.

Around 45 members of the 80-seat House have registered themselves to address the legislature and only 19 of them spoke during the morning and afternoon sessions Saturday.

The tone for the debate was set by the Finance Committee of the House which recommended that the budget be approved without alterations provided that the government undertakes to implement a series of sweeping measures in almost every sector of the economy and bureaucracy. It also called for cutting the deficit in the budget.

Samir Habashneh (Karak), rapporteur of the committee, read out the 67 recommendations of the panel which were finalised after discussions with the concerned members of the Council of Ministers.

The JD 1.674 billion budget envisages a net deficit of JD 50 million after making allowances for foreign aid worth JD 165 million.

Current expenditures are estimated at JD 1.23 billion and capital expenditures at JD 443.1 million. Domestic revenues are estimated at JD 1.4 billion, which will cover all current expenses and 38 per cent of capital expenditures.

A secondary budget of JD 390 has also been drawn up but the allocations of this budget depends on Jordan receiving additional external aid during the year.

Ali Abul Ragheb (Amman), chairman of the Finance Committee, said the government had agreed to implement most of the recommended measures, including, among other things, the doubling of annual increments to civil servants, increasing the pension of retired civil servants and servicemen, reducing customs duties in a manner that would benefit the low-income group of the population, and improving the climate for investment in Jordan.

"The government should not find it difficult to implement most of the recommendations," Mr. Abul Ragheb told the Jordan Times during a break in Saturday's session. "The report of the committee is a well-presented document and the recommendations should go a long way in improving the overall situation in the country."

"We believe that some of the projections for revenues are moderately estimated, and there should be enough income for the government to meet the higher costs," he said.

In any case, the deputy said, the Finance Committee expected that the government should also receive an additional income of at least JD 50 million from implementing some of the projects it had recommended after investing in them.

Abdullah Akayleh, a prominent member of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), said his bloc had not reached a "final decision" on what position to adopt on the budget. "We are meeting tomorrow and I expect a decision to be taken then," he said.

The IAF, which has 17 members in the House and spearheads the opposition in Parliament, is widely expected to use the debate on the budget to criticise government policies. However, it was not clear whether all its deputies would adopt a common stand vis-a-vis the budget itself.

Deputies who openly expressed their rejection of the budget during Saturday's morning session were Bassam Haddadin (leftist Zarqa), Nazih Ammarin (centrist, Karak), and Saleh Shawata (leftist, Irbid).

The National Action Front of 17 pro-establishment deputies led the voice of support for the budget.

Addressing the House on behalf of the front, Nader Abu Shaar (Al Ahd Party, Irbid), highlighted what the front saw as the economic priorities of the Kingdom and emphasised the need to ensure that development is evenly spread throughout the country.

The Finance Committee, citing the various ministries and government departments and agencies by name, recommended that:

(Continued on page 3)

Arafat wants to visit Jordan, but Amman insists on substance

By Nermeen Murad
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Arrangements for a meeting between His Majesty King Hussein and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in Amman are under way but the Jordanian side says it is not ready for "another formality meeting" and insists that any visit by Mr. Arafat to the Kingdom should include signing agreements and substantive talks.

Palestinian sources in Amman said that Mr. Arafat was "interested in visiting Amman this week" but that the Jordanian side had not scheduled a date for the visit.

"Arafat wants to visit Jordan this week," a Palestinian source who asked he remain anonymous told the Jordan Times. "But the Jordanian government has not yet fixed a date for his visit because of the pending issues between the two sides."

Information Minister Jawad Anani, in an interview with the Jordan Times, said that while the Kingdom welcomes a visit by Mr. Arafat "neither side can subject both peoples to another formality meeting."

"We need to go into substance and we need to sign agreements," he said.

"Jordan views the visit of Chairman Arafat, when it happens, which will be the first after Arafat's entry into Palestinian territory, as coming at a time when many issues have reached ripening age," he said.

The visit, Dr. Anani said, "must address issues and should bear fruit and to do that it needs preparatory work."

Among the most important pending issues between the Jordanian government and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) are an economic agreement governing monetary and trade relations between the Kingdom and the West Bank as well as arrangements for border [illegible] related issues.

Many of these issues have been discussed by Jordanian and Palestinian officials during a series of intermittant meetings over the past three years but none materialised into signed agreements.

The Jordanian government, although officially maintaining a conciliatory tone towards the situation of Palestinians under Israeli occupation and the difficult situations of the newly-established Palestinian Authority in Gaza and Jericho, nevertheless feel uneasy about Mr. Arafat's failure to ratify agreements reached between the Jordanian government and PNA-mandated officials.

Privately, some Jordanian officials have blamed Mr. Arafat personally for the increasing tension between the two sides and have said that they will not be used as "propaganda gimmic" to serve Mr. Arafat's internal Palestinian political considerations.

What appeared to be a decrease in the tension over the past couple of months between the Jordanian and the Palestinian Authority, with reports of a pending summit between the Jordanian and Palestinian leaderships, again suffered a setback in the Casablanca summit of the leaders of the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

According to an official attending the Casablanca summit, the Palestinian foreign minister, Farouk Al Kaddoumi, rejected a Jordanian proposal that would thank the Kingdom for its role in safeguarding Islamic holy sites and the services rendered in the years after the Israeli occupation.

"We did not request an acknowledgement of a future role for Jordan as a guardian of the holy sites, and the [illegible] a routine affair in this kind of summit," the official told the Jordan Times.

"This was construed as a political statement because the PLO does not trust Jordan's future intentions," the official said.

Mr. Kaddoumi's rejection of the Jordanian proposal, according to Jordanian sources, went against an earlier agreement between His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan and Palestinian leader Faisal Husseini two weeks ago.

The PLO position, according to the sources, also appeared to contradict the spirit by which the PLO had received the statements of Crown Prince Hassan in the Casablanca economic conference in October which dealt with Jordan's Awqaf role in the West Bank.

"It really put a dent in the Jordanian-Palestinian relationship," Dr. Anani had told the Jordan Times in response to a question over the results of the Casablanca summit.

But Dr. Anani said: "Mr. Arafat is welcome to visit Jordan despite what happened in Casablanca because the relations between the Jordanian and Palestinian peoples are not based on ad hoc positions as was the case in Casablanca."

"This is a relationship that stems from deep-rooted considerations and interests," he said.

AFP adds from Gaza City: Mr. Arafat will set a date soon for his first visit to Amman since Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel, a Palestinian official said Saturday.

Nabil Abu Rudeina, Mr. Arafat's spokesman, denied earlier reports that the trip would take place Sunday.

"We have not fixed a date for President Arafat's visit to the Jordanian capital, Amman," he said.

But he added "the two sides will very soon agree on [illegible]

Russian troops stand at one of the checkpoints on the border between Chechenya and Daghestan. Thousands of refugees are leaving Chechenya following the heavy Russian bombardments (AFP photo)

Russian forces battle and bomb Chechen fighters

GROZNY (Agencies) — Russian troops battled Chechen rebels around the capital Grozny on Saturday as warplanes bombed the city and officials struggled to cope with a growing refugee crisis.

At least two more civilians were killed early on Saturday, adding to the dozens of casulties reported by both sides in Moscow's biggest military operation since the ill-fated Soviet campaign in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

The Russian government warned it would launch an all-out attack against Grozny "in the next few days" if Chechen separatists do not surrender, Russian Television reported.

"The Russian federal authorities will undertake armed action in the next few days to take Grozny under their control" if the breakaway Russian republic's leaders do not surrender, television quoted Russian Deputy Prime Minister Nikolai Yegorov as saying.

Mr. Yegorov, responsible for questions relating to nationalities, called on Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev to "take the necessary steps for disarmament and restoration of constitutional order," implicitly meaning Russian predominance.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin has called a meeting of the state Security Council for Monday to discuss the Chechen crisis.

It will examine "all political and military aspects" of the situation, the presidency said.

He has also put off until next week a statement he was due to issue Saturday outlining proposals to settle the conflict between Moscow and the breakaway Caucasian republic.

Since the previous meeting of the Security Council on Dec. 17 Russian bombardments on Grozny have left more than 50 dead, mostly civilians, according to journalists on the spot.

Russian tanks held positions between two and 15 kilometres from Grozny an Saturday.

Mr. Yeltsin has faced a barrage of criticism from political opponents and allies alike over his decision to send in troops to bring Chechnya to heel and disarm supporters of Mr. Dudayev.

Foreign governments, while describing the conflict as an internal Russian affair, have voiced concern about civilian casualties and tens of thousands of refugees have fled the daily bombing.

The raids have forced thousands of people into cellars, disrupted electricity supplies and communications links. But Chechen resistance has been strong and, combined with cold and snowy winter weather, it has held back the Russian advance.

Russian warplanes started flying over the town at around two a.m. (2300 GMT on Friday) and at least 20 loud explosions could be heard in different parts of Grozny from four a.m. (0100 GMT).

One missile hit a five-storey apartment block in central Grozny. The bodies of a middle-aged ethnic Russian couple were seen nearby after the attack.

Interior Minister Viktor Yerin, quoted by Russia's ITAR-TASS news agency, said his men had beaten back attacks by Dudayev supporters.

Speaking from an operational command centre in the North Caucasus, Mr. Yerin repeated Russian claims that foreign mercenaries were fighting alongside the Chechen separatists. He said they would be shown on television.

TASS said Russian planes destroyed two enemy tanks and other vehicles carrying Chechen fighters. No independent confirmation was immediately available.

Tens of thousands of people have fled the bombing into neighbouring Ingushetia, whose people have the same ethnic roots as the Chechens.

Reuter correspondent Anatoly Verbin reported from Sleptsovsk, on the Chechen-Ingush border, that about 65,000 refugees had crossed into Ingushetia and were being largely supported by local people.

In Moscow, TASS said the refugee flow had grown considerably over the past 24 hours and a total of 23,916 people were being given shelter, food and allowances by migration services.

The latest bombing raids came amid fresh efforts to halt the fighting. An aide to the deputy head of the federation council, Ramazan Abdulatipov, said he was preparing for inter-parliamentary talks with the Chechen republic.

"It is impossible to set a date for the talks because of the lack of communications with Grozny," the aide said.

Tass said the speaker of the Chechen parliament had confirmed his willingness to take [illegible]

(Continued on page 3)

PLO wants urgent Security Council meeting

GAZA (R) — The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) called on Saturday for an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, which it said violated its 1993 autonomy accord with Israel.

Marwan Kanafani, PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's press advisor, said after the weekly cabinet meeting of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) which administers self-rule in Gaza and Jericho:

"The cabinet called on the U.S. and Russia, co-sponsors of the peace process, and on Europeans to pay attention to collusion between the Israeli army and settlers on expansion of settlements and land confiscation."

He told Reuters the cabinet further "called on the co-sponsors and the U.N. Security Council to hold an immediate meeting to discuss Israel's settlement policy, which constitutes a violation of the PLO-Israel accord."

Expansion of settlements, in which more than 100,000 Israelis live among the more than 1.3 million Palestinians in the West Bank, was a cornerstone of the former hardline Likud government, and a main obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin defeated the Likud in 1992 elections promising a settlement halt, a position that paved the way for the autonomy deal with the PLO.

But Mr. Rabin has allowed some West Bank settlement to continue, especially around East Jerusalem.

Mr. Kanafani said unless there is an immediate halt to settlement expansion "the peace process will lose its meaning, and the PLO holds Israel responsible for violating the accord."

The PLO has protested to Israel at the expansion of existing settlements, particularly in the Jerusalem area, and the increased confiscation of Palestinian lands to build new settlements.

The Palestinian Authority will set up a committee to find ways to safeguard Palestinian lands against confiscation, Mr. Kanafani said. He did not elaborate.

The Israeli-PLO accord postponed discussion of the thorny issue of settlements until negotiations begin on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israeli gunners kill Lebanese hunter

RACHAYA, Lebanon (AFP) — An Israeli tank opened fire on a group of hunters in South Lebanon Saturday, killing one and wounding four, amid further attacks on the Israeli "security zone" by Hizbollah guerrillas.

Security officials said the tank fired at the hunters from a distance of 500 metres near Hasbaya village, in a part of the zone inhabited by Lebanese Druze.

Voice of the South, the radio of Israel's proxy South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia, said the tank crew believed the hunters were "terrorists."

Commander Guora Anbar, head of the Israeli liaison unit in South Lebanon, apologised to the victim's family over the incident and said the army was ready to help the wounded hunters.

Further south, Hizbollah launched four attacks on SLA positions in the "security zone" overnight Friday.

The group said its fighters killed or wounded six Israeli soldiers near Baraachit.

There was no independent confirmation of the casualties.

Lebanese security officials said the Iranian-backed guer- [illegible] propelled grenades (RPGs), 30 mortar shells and two Katyusha rockets.

The Israeli army and SLA hit back with 60 shells fired from tanks that crashed onto the outskirts of villages just north of the "security zone," the security officials added.

Voice of the South said SLA positions at Haddatha, Beit Yahoun and Baraachit came under RPG and shell fire for about half an hour during the night, but reported no casualties.

The fighting came several hours after Israeli artillery, warplanes and helicopters pounded South Lebanon in retaliation for a Hizbollah attack that killed two Israeli soldiers and wounded seven others.

The Syrian government newspaper Tishrin denounced the Israeli attacks.

"Israel has tried all sorts of terrorism and aggression to drag Lebanon into a separate deal but it has failed, and its new attacks will only strengthen Lebanon's determination and rejection of the effort," it said.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin must "tell his people the so-called security zone does not ensure security for the occupation forces and [illegible] national resistance from fulfilling its sacred duty," the paper said.

"Israel will only enjoy silence after it withdraws its soldiers from Lebanon and after it supports a just and comprehensive settlement leading to the return of occupied territory," Tishrin added.

Mr. Rabin visited his country's border with Lebanoin on Friday and said Israel would have ot step up security in the occupied zone.

But he ruled out widening the zone, a strip of Israeli-occupied land 10 kilometres wide inside Lebanon.

Israel and Syria have made no tangible progress in the negotiations they began at the Middle East peace conference in Madrid in 1991 (see page 12).

Hizbollah has vowed to avenge a carbomb attack on Wednesday in a Beirut suburb which killed three. It accused Israel of planting the bomb.

The group was behind an attack on Monday in which an Israeli soldier was killed. The week's casualties brought to six the number of Israeli soldiers killed in South Lebanon this month and 21 this year.

opposition accuse Mr. Rabin of exercising restraint in the face of attacks in Lebanon to avoid harming Arab-Israeli peace talks.

But Mr. Rabin said fewer soldiers were killed this year in South Lebanon than last year.

Peace talks between Israel and Lebanon, also launched at the 1991 Middle East peace conference, have floundered while Lebanese leaders wait for progress on the Israel-Syrian track.

"The supplies to Hizbollah arrive from Iran through Damascus. The headquarters, the training bases are located... in areas controlled by the Syrians," he told Israel's Channel Two television.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres stressed Hizbollah had not violated U.S. brokered understandings reached last July.

"This is still not a war of attrition," Mr. Peres told Israel Television. "It still doesn't deviate from the framework of the understandings reached."

The understandings, which ended a week-long Israeli air and artillery onslaught, were meant to remove the civilian populations in Israel and [illegible]

Muslims join Christians in Mideast Christmas

NICOSIA (AFP) — Many Muslims in the Middle East have decked out their homes and streets with festive trees and streamers as they prepare to join the region's 15 million Christians in celebrating Christmas Day.

Only two countries in the region ignore the festivities — Israel, apart from its Arab Christians, and Saudi Arabia, where Christian priests are banned.

Middle East Christians do not all celebrate the nativity on the same day.

Catholics and certain Orthodox churches celebrate the birth of Jesus on Dec. 25, while other Orthodox churches commemorate it on Jan. 6 and Egypt's Coptic Christians on Jan. 7.

Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat celebrated Christmas in his own way by visiting a Catholic school in Gaza Thursday with a Father Christmas dressed in traditional red and white attire.

Most of the 2,500 Christians in the autonomous Gaza Strip have Jan. 7 as their Christmas Day, as they belong to Orthodox churches. Only 230 Gazan Catholics and some 50 Baptists will be celebrating it on Dec. 25.

Bethlehem on the occupied West Bank is home to 10,000 Christians and is expecting 20,000 pilgrims to turn up for Christmas.

Midnight mass was celebrated Saturday night in the Church of the Nativity where Jesus was born, according to Christian tradition.

A huge Christmas tree dominates Manger Square in the town centre, where buildings were draped with 2,000 Palestinian flags.

The Palestinian self-rule authority took charge of tourism in the West Bank a month ago.

Meanwhile, Muslims have decorated the main mosque in the Arab town of Nazareth in northern Israel, where Jesus lived, and devoted a sermon at Friday prayers to the subject of Christmas.

"Christ is a prophet for Muslims, his birth was recorded in the Koran. It is fitting that Christmas should be the subject of the sermon," said Atef Yousef Al Fahum, keeper of the town's White Mosque.

Christmas is an important event in Lebanon, home to the Middle East's largest Christian community. In the capital Beirut, shops and streets are lit up as often as the country's rationed electricity supplies allow.

Christmas lights also decorate the hotels, shops and streets of Amman, even though Christians only make up five per cent of the country's 4.3 million inhabitants.

Every year King Hussein displays a huge Christmas tree in his palace.

This year for the first time in Syria churches and residents of the Christian district of Al Kassaa in Damascus clubbed together to buy lights for their streets and parks.

Christmas trees have pride of place not only in Christian homes but also increasingly in Muslim homes.

The grand mufti of Syria, Sheikh Ahmad Keftaro, on Friday hosted a conference at a Damascus mosque on the birth of Christ.

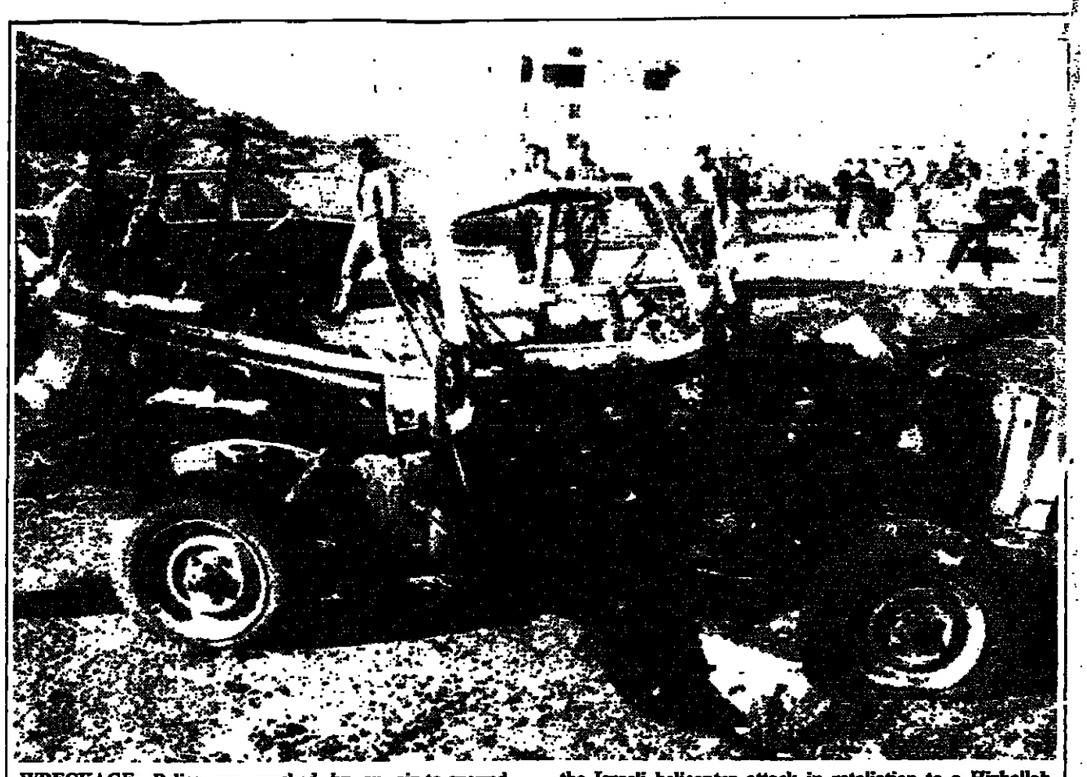
In the Gulf, certain monarchies allow discreet Christmas celebrations.

Many Muslim families, especially in Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, celebrate by inviting their Christian friends to dinner.

Iran has a large Armenian Christian minority of some 250,000 people. Christmas tree sellers line the streets of Tehran and some shops sell Christmas decorations at sky-high prices.

Despite the crippling effects of four years of international sanctions, some Iraqis also plan to celebrate Christmas.

A giant Father Christmas stands at the entrance to the Rashid Hotel which, along with other hotels, will host celebrations for the wealthier sections of Baghdad society.



WRECKAGE: Police car crushed by an air-to-ground rocket fired Friday by an Israeli helicopter in South Lebanon near the town of Nabatiyeh a few kilometres from the occupied "security zone." Two policemen were killed in the Israeli helicopter attack in retaliation to a Hizbollah attack which killed two Israeli soldiers and wounded seven others (see page one) (AFP photo)

Tourism slump leaves Egypt's beggars with crumbs

CAIRO (AFP) — Egypt's child beggars are facing a desperate plight as tourists fearing attacks by Muslim militants stay away, depriving the rag-tag gangs of their main source of income.

"Yesterday I only got $1, whereas before I could make between $10 to $20 a day in winter," said barefooted 12-year-old Mohammad Maher, hanging around outside the archaeological museum.

Police estimate there are about 50,000 beggars in the Egyptian capital, who dodge police patrols to gather near hotels and restaurants, markets and archaeological sites.

The tourist industry has slumped since Muslim militants launched a violent campaign in March 1992 aimed at toppling the government. It has claimed the lives of 12 foreigners.

"On good days I could earn $100 daily, but now the foreigners have gone and those who come have only got crumbs in their pockets and offer us (Egyptian) pounds," said Ayman Nabil, 13, wearing dirty, torn rags he had found a pitch near the American University.

"Arab women give more money than the men because they take more pity when we moan," Ayman said.

The main beggars' site is Ramses Square near the railway station and the bus terminus. It is controlled by gang "bosses" who send hundreds of children there every morning.

The gang leaders include Mohammad Abu Rassein, or Mohammad with two heads — a nickname designed to show his band that he is watching them with four eyes.

Every morning at 6:00 a.m. he sends out his troops, complete with lieutenants to ensure none of them try to escape. At the end of the day queues of youngsters hand over the fruits of their labours.

"Anyone who tries to cheat him of a pound is in for it. Mohammad Abu Rassein is merciless and can take revenge by cutting off a child's leg or an arm. He says that that way the victim will evoke even more pity and bring him more money," said Adel Al Sayad, 11.

The children spend their nights in wooden shacks or abandoned vehicles close to the square.

Despite the hardship Adel prefers his life on the streets to being with his father at home, where he says he was badly beaten for the slightest thing.

Abu Rassein "gives me somewhere to sleep and has promised to bail me out if I am arrested," says Adel.

But Mohammad Selim prefers to be his own boss. "I know how to take care of myself. Last week I hurt a policemen in the leg when he was trying to arrest me."

A senior official from the vice squad, responsible for trying to stamp out begging, said about 1,400 beggars, including 200 minors, were arrested each week.

"Sentences vary between one and two months in prison, but they are rarely applied because the courts free them under caution until the trial. As they have no addresses or identity cards they are then tried in their absence."

There are frequent reports in the Egyptian press of hundreds of thousands of pounds being found in beggars' homes after their deaths.

But according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), more than 20 per cent of Egyptians live below the poverty line.

Indyk named as new U.S. ambassador to Israel

WASHINGTON (USIA) — President Bill Clinton announced his intention to nominate Martin Indyk, of Washington, D.C., as the U.S. ambassador to Israel.

Following is the text of the White House announcement:

The president today announced his intention to nominate Martin Indyk, of Washington, D.C., as ambassador to Israel.

"I am proud to nominate Martin to this vital post," the president said. "I am confident his extensive background and experience in the region as well as his commitment to furthering the peace process and the role he has played as my advisor on these issues will serve to promote American interests in the Middle East."

Since January 1993, Dr. Indyk has served as Special Assistant to the president and Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council. During that period, he has served as principal advisor to the president and the National Security Advisor on Arab-Israeli issues, Iraq, Iran and South Asia. He has been a senior member of Secretary Christopher's Middle East peace team and serves as the White House representative on the U.S.-Israel Science and Technology Commission.

Prior to entering the government, Dr. Indyk served for eight years as the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a reserach institute that specialises in Arab-Israeli relations.

He was also an adjunct professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies where he taught Israeli politics and foreign policy. Dr. Indyk has published widely on U.S. policy towards the Arab-Israeli peace process and on U.S.-Israel relations.

Martin Indyk was born on July 1, 1951, in London, England. He was raised and educated in Australia where he received a Bachelor of Economics from Sydney University and a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Australian National University. Dr. Indyk is married to Jill Collier and has two children, Sarah (14) and Jacob (10).

Language no barrier at Cairo's deaf-and-dumb restaurant

CAIRO (AFP) — The fast food revolution scored a new victory in Cairo this week with the successful launch of the Middle East's first restaurant for deaf mutes.

Ali Sarhan, director of the new Kentucky *Fried Chicken* outlet, beams as he holds up his forefinger and little finger — the deaf-and-dumb sign for "I like you."

Mr. Sarhan, 28, is the only member of the restaurant staff who can speak.

"When I was chosen to launch the first such restaurant in the Middle East and Africa I wanted to meet the challenge and make my employees more productive than people who can communicate verbally," he explains.

The restaurant employs 30 deaf mutes, including four women, aged between 18 and 25.

A bright panel on the wall shows the alphabet used in sign language.

The customer makes his order by pointing at a photograph of the food and drink he wants.

Flashing lights have replaced all the sound signals used in other restaurants.

Mr. Sarhan says he learnt sign language in two months.

"I followed the same method as one would to learn a foreign language — I entered a new world, a world of silence."

Mr. Sarhan says he spent all his time with deaf mutes, copying their signs and learning from his mistakes.

"We talked about football, fashion, politics. I repeated the new words in front of the mirror — I'm afraid my friends regarded me as insane."

Mr. Sarhan has only praise for his colleagues.

"Working and living among them I have come to realise that they are not handicapped at all. Each one of them performs his job to the highest standard."

He says the new employees were initially nervous about having to serve other people, but after four months' training and two months on the job "their families are delighted with the transformation in their personalities."

Hoda Abdul Moneim, 18, says she is very happy in her new job.

"Before this I was doing nothing. I spent three years getting a degree at the deaf-and-dumb college, then stayed at home for a year unemployed. I learnt to knit to pass the time."

The customers are equally pleased with the service.

"Since the restaurant opened we have only come here," says *Hoda Al Agati*, a translation teacher at Cairo University.

"The children love this place because the employees are so kind to them," she says, her six-year-old daughter Ayat nodding in agreement.

Foreigners have not been slow to visit the restaurant, either.

"This place is a godsend," says Juan Castuera, a Spaniard who has lived in Cairo for one year.

"We don't speak Arabic and sign language is international."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Demirel urges 'new approach' to Cyprus problem

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkish President Suleyman Demirel has called for a "new approach" to find a solution to the division of Cyprus, in an interview published here. "The lack of progress on the Cyprus question clearly necessitates a new approach for a settlement on the island," Mr. Demirel told the English-language Turkish Daily News. Cyprus has been divided between Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot communities since Turkish troops invaded the east Mediterranean island in 1974 and occupied the northern third. The Turkish republic of northern Cyprus, declared in 1983, is recognised only by Ankara. The United Nations, whose peacekeeping forces patrol the "green line" boundary between the two communities, supports a bizonal and bicommunal federal solution in Cyprus. Confidence-building measures proposed by the U.N. in 1993 stalled last April when talks between the two sides broke down. Informal U.N.-brokered talks between Turkish-Cypriot leader Rauf Denktash and Cypriot President Glafkos Clerides also became deadlocked in October. "It has not been possible to get any results, so one needs to think about that some more," Mr. Demirel said. "Let us see if the present approach is getting us anywhere, if not one should look for a new one." He added that Turkey supported a political solution achieved through peaceful methods.

New Year celebrations not kosher — MK says

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A religious member of Knesset (MK) on Friday urged the education ministry to discourage young Jews from celebrating New Year, Israel Radio reported. Shaul Yahalom, of the right-wing opposition National Religious Party, told the radio that New Year celebrations overnight to Jan. 1 were a Christian festival. "Saint Sylvester is a Christian festival which celebrates the new year, according to the Gregorian calendar, and bears the name of Pope Sylvester I," he said. In a letter to Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein, Mr. Yahalom asked that "young Jews are discouraged from taking part in this celebration." The MK condemned New Year celebrations which have become more common in Israel's hotels and discotheques in recent years. Israel's rabbinate has repeatedly threatened to withdraw certificates guaranteeing that such institutions serve up kosher food if they host such celebrations. The Jewish New year according to the Hebrew calender fell in September this year.

U.S. warns nationals against travel to Algeria

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States urged its nationals Friday not to travel to Algeria, and warned of increased risks posed by ground travel. "Continuing attacks against foreigners indicate that the level of risk in Algeria has increased," the State Department said in a statement. "Specifically there is a heightened risk of danger to persons travelling overland without adequate security arrangements." "All American citizens in Algeria are urged to exercise maximum caution and to regularly evaluate their personal security practices," the statement added.

Turkish police doused with petrol

ANKARA (R) — Turkish police who tried to tear down a row of illegal fish restaurants in Istanbul on Friday were doused with flaming petrol by one of several angry owners, state television reported. The owners of 11 shacks serving cooked fish on the banks of the Bosphorus — with a licence to sell uncooked seafood only — clambered onto roofs with jerrycans of petrol as police tried to evict them. When police and firemen began to climb onto one hut, a protester ignited the fuel. State television said one policeman and one of the protesters were hospitalised for burns and at least three people were detained.

Yemen, Sudan sign cooperation accords

SANAA (AFP) — Yemen and Sudan signed a series of cooperation accords Friday after a four-day meeting of their joint cooperation committee here, officials said. The accords set out cooperation in the fields of foreign policy, the oil industry, education, social affairs, information, culture, youth and sports, they said. The agreements were signed by Yemeni Prime Minister Abdul Aziz Abdul Ghani and Sudan's First Vice President General Al Zobeir Mohammad Salah, who co-chaired the seventh session of the joint committee. Gen. Zobeir also said there were "positive signs" for Yemeni mediation to resolve a dispute between Sudan and Eritrea. A Sudanese delegation headed by General Bakri Hussein Saleh, an advisor to President Omar Al Bechir, arrived in Sanaa Friday to try to reach a settlement with Eritrean leaders. The official Yemeni news agency SABA said a joint Sudanese-Eritrean committee would meet next week in Sanaa. Eritrea, which gained independence in May last year after 30 years of war with Ethopia, announced on Dec. 6 it had broken off diplomatic ties with Sudan which it accused of "subversive activities" against it.

Iran, Cuba seek to expand ties

TEHRAN (AFP) — Iran and Cuba announced their intention to boost economic cooperation during a visit here Saturday by Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Gonzales. Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said Tehran wanted to find "practical ways to expand cooperation" with Havana, in a statement issued by the presidential office. During talks with Mr. Gonzales the Iranian leader expressed hope that the Cuban people would overcome their difficulties through their "efforts and strong will" — an apparent reference to the U.S. embargo against the Caribbean island. Mr. Gonzales, who arrived here Friday, praised Iran's "humanitarian stand" towards Cuba over "human rights and the embargo," the statement said. He called for greater cooperation in the transfer of technology, energy resources, health and sugar production. The Cuban minister also met Saturday with Parliament Speaker Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati. Tehran and Havana established diplomatic ties after the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Bilateral trade is worth around $20 million annually. Cuba is helping Iran to build a sugar production plant and selling it pharmaceutical products. A high-level Iranian delegation led by Construction Minister Gholamreza Foruzesh visited *Cuba in June to discuss economic and trade ties.*

Fire suts Sudan academy for journalists

KHARTOUM (R) — Fire badly damaged Sudan's communications academy where journalists are trained, a Khartoum newspaper reported on Saturday. The government-owned Al Sudan Al Hadith (Modern Sudan) said the fire on Wednesday burnt down the main studios and destroyed production equipment at the academy, but it spared the main offices and lecture halls. Academy Director Abu Bakr Waziri did not say what caused the fire although he suggested a link with the death of a security guard, whose body was found at a lecture hall that escaped the blaze. No further explanation was given. The academy, which is situated next to state radio in Omdurman, Khartoum's twin city, had been guarded by police but the force was withdrawn some months ago due to high cost.

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel: 773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

17:00 ..... A Year in the Life
18:30 ..... Varieties
19:00 ..... News in French
19:15 ..... Ushuaia
19:30 ..... Coach
20:00 ... Silent Night — HollyNight
20:30 ..... Quantum Leap
21:10 ..... Galactica
22:00 ..... News in English
22:30 Feature film: "The Little Match Girl"
23:59 ..... The Upper Hand

PRAYER TIMES

05:06 ..... Fajr
06:28 ..... *(Sunrise) Duha*
11:35 ..... Dhuhr
14:19 ..... 'Asr
16:42 ..... Maghreb
18:05 ..... 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Sweifieh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church, Tel. 632785.
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590.
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440.
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terrasancta Church Tel: 622366
Church of the Annunciation Tel. 623541.
Anglican Church Tel. 630851, Tel. 628543.
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331.
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261.
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751.
Amman International Church Tel. 652526.
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel: 824328.
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 684195
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazarene Tel.675691.
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology.

It will be sunny and warm with clouds appearing at different altitudes and winds southeasterly moderate. In Aqaba, winds will be northerly moderate and seas calm.

Min./Max. temp.

Amman 3/15
Aqaba ..... 9 / 21
Deserts ..... 1 / 15
Jordan Valley ..... 9 / 20

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 13, Aqaba 19 Humidity readings: Amman 52 per cent. Aqaba 5 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:
Dr. Fakhri Tayeh 885880
Dr. Salman Al Daboubi 776751
Dr. Nidal Al Dahleh 827195
Dr. Bassam Karadsheh 759200
Firas pharmacy 661912
Ferdows pharmacy 778336
Al Ascma pharmacy 637055
Nairoukh pharmacy 623672
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Nairoujh pharmacy 623672
Najib pharmacy 847632

IRBID:
Dr. Ali Shoqairi 246140
Alquds pharmacy ..... (—)

ZARQA:
Dr. Mufid Dhamra 985522
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 843402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381
RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussein Medical Centre 813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, J. Amn 644281/6
Akilch Maternity, J. Amn. 642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 664171/4
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Muasher Hospital 667227/9
The Islamic, Abdali 666127/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali 664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen ... 777101/3
Al-Bashir, J. Ashrafieh 775111/26
Army, Marka 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital 674155

ZARQA:
Zarqa Govt. Hospital (09)983323
Zarqa National Hospital (09)900560
Ibn Sina Hospital ..... (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)990990

IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital ..... (02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Ibn Al Nafees Hospital ..... (02)247100

AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital ..... (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. (08)53200-5, where it should always be verified.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

05:35 ..... Bangkok (RJ)
07:45 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
08:35 ..... Jeddah (RJ)
09:00 ..... Damascus (RJ)
09:05 ..... Larnaca (RJ)
09:55 ..... Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:15 ..... Beirut (RJ)
10:15 ..... Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
17:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
17:20 ..... Brussels, Paris (RJ)
17:55 ..... London (RJ)
18:10 ..... Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
18:40 ..... Athens (RJ)
18:45 ..... Frankfurt (RJ)
19:35 ..... Vienna (RJ)
19:35 ..... Vienna (add) (RJ)
20:10 ..... Rome (RJ)
21:00 ..... Frankfurt (add) (RJ)
00:20 ..... Cairo (RJ)
00:45 ..... Aqaba (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

12:35 ..... Manama (GF)
14:25 ..... Moscow (SU)
20:05 ..... Cairo (MS)
20:20 ..... Beirut (ME)
22:55 ..... Istanbul (TK)
01:10 ..... Amsterdam (KL)

DEPARTURES

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights (Terminal 1)

05:30 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
06:25 ..... Beirut (RJ)
08:30 ..... Frankfurt (RJ)
10:30 ..... Frankfurt (add) (RJ)
10:50 ..... Tunis, Casablanca (RJ)
10:55 ..... Vienna (RJ)
11:05 ..... Vienna (add) (RJ)
11:15 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
11:30 ..... Rome (RJ)
11:50 ..... Athens (RJ)
20:00 ..... Dhahran (RJ)
20:15 ..... Cairo (RJ)
20:30 ..... Jeddah (RJ)
20:45 ..... New Delhi (RJ)
20:45 ..... Damascus (RJ)
21:25 ..... Abu Dhabi, Dubai (RJ)
21:30 Bangkok, Jakarta (add) (RJ)
22:00 ..... Singapore, Jakarta (RJ)
22:30 ..... Bangkok (RJ)
22:30 ..... Aqaba (RJ)
22:45 ..... Sanaa (RJ)

Other Flights (Terminal 2)

07:10 ..... Rome (AZ)
07:45 ..... Beirut (ME)
13:30 ..... Doha, Muscat (GF)
16:05 ..... Moscow (SU)
21:00 ..... Cairo (MS)
02:20 ..... Amsterdam (KL)

HIJAZ RAILWAY TRAIN

Dep. Amman ... 8:00 a.m. every Monday
Arr. Damascus 5:00 p.m. every Monday
Dep. Damascus 7:30 a.m. every Sunday
Arr. Amman .... 5:00 p.m. every Sunday

MARKET PRICES

Upper/lower price in fils per kg.

Apple 700/ 500
Banana 680
Banana (Mukammar) 620
Cabbage ..... 240 / 160
Carrot 280/180
Cauliflower 450/ 250
Clamentine 380/ 240
Cucumbers (large) ..... 250 / 150
Cucumbers (small) ..... 500 / 300
Eggplant 340/ 240
Garlic 500/300
Grape Fruit ..... 240 / 160
Lemon ..... 260 / 160
Marrow (large) ..... 160 / 100
Marrow (small) ..... 500 / 250
Onion (green) 380/ 200
Onion (dry) ..... 470 / 350
Orange 520/300
Pepper (hot) ..... 540 / 320
Pepper (sweet) ..... 600 / 400
Potato 300/ 200
Radish ..... 250 / 150
Spinach 300/ 200
String Beans ..... 1000 / 500
Tomato 500/ 250

هكذا من الأصل

HOME NEWS IN BRIEF

More Danes expected

COPENHAGEN (Petra) — The year 1995 will witness a record number of Danish tourists visiting Jordan, officials at one of Denmark's major travel and tours agencies expect. The officials, from Larssen Tours, said they have finalised preparations to meet the expected increase in the numbers of Danish tourists flocking at the agency to visit Jordan's tourist sites.

Omani official visits Yarmouk

IRBID (Petra) — President of Yarmouk University Marwan Kamal Saturday discussed with the secretary general of Sultan Qaboos University, Hamad Ben Hamad Al Afiri means of enhancing cooperation between the two universities in various fields. Also reviewed at the meeting, held at Yarmouk University, were the two universities' academic and administrative programmes and plans, especially in higher education fields.

Warm weather during holiday

AMMAN (Petra) — Fair weather will prevail in the Kingdom during the Christmas holidays as the Kingdom will remain under the effect of high pressure, the Department of Meteorology announced. The department said sunny weather will continue for the upcoming four days. It warned of frost formation in hilly areas and the desert late in the evening and in the early hours of the morning. In Amman, the department expected temperatures to reach a maximum of 14-15 degrees Celsius.

'Green belt' for cement factory

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordanian Environment Society plans to plant 15,000 trees around the Jordan Cement Factory in Fuheis to reduce dust polluting the surrounding area and to prevent soil erosion. The project aims at planting a "green belt" of trees with a total length of seven kilometres and width of 21 metres financed by the Cement Company itself.

Workshop to study oryx habitat

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) Saturday announced it was organising a workshop early next year in cooperation with international organisations to discuss the habitat of the Arabian oryx. Society President Anis Muasher said that the three-day meeting would tackle all studies that have been conducted on the oryx since its reintroduction in Jordan in 1978. The oryx had disappeared from Jordan for 60 years until 1978 when it was introduced to the Shomari wildlife reserve. Khaled Irani, from the society said the workshop findings would help Jordan work out a national strategy for the rehabilitation of the oryx and the natural habitat where they can live and multiply.

Tawjihi preparation in Tafileh

TAFILEH (Petra) — The education department in the Tafileh governorate had finalised preparations for holding the general secondary certificate, or tawjihi, examination due to start later this month. Department Director Abdul Majeed Al Jalamdeh said the department has already prepared 19 examination halls at all governorate's areas. He said the number of students who will sit for the examination in the governorate was 1,244. The department, said Mr. Jalamdeh, has convened a meeting for all examination hall directors and reviewed with them regulations and procedures for the examinations.

New book on Jordan's Islamic sites

RABAT, Morocco (Petra) — The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ISESCO) has issued a new book on Islamic cultural sites in Jordan written by professor Wa'el Al Rashdan. The 108-page book details Islamic fortresses, mosques, monuments of the Prophet's companions as well as photos and maps of these sites.

Ukrainian friends to arrive

AMMAN (Petra) — A delegation representing the Ukrainian-Jordanian Friendship Society in Kiev will arrive in Amman Monday on a week-long visit to Jordan. The delegation is expected to sign an agreement of friendship and cooperation with the Jordanian-Ukrainian Society in Amman. The delegation will hold meetings and seminars with representatives of Jordanian commercial, industrial and academic societies. The Ukranian-Jordanian society in Kiev and the Jordanian-Ukrainian society in Amman were established earlier this year.

Civil defence courses conclude

DEIR ALLA (Petra) — Two Civil Defence courses organised by the Deir Alla Civil Defence Department Saturday concluded at the Dier Alla Vocational Training Centre. The five-day courses included lectures and exercises on ways to deal with burns, fractures, fires and first aid training.

Majali receives invitation

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali Saturday received Tunisian Ambassador to Jordan Mohammad Mongi Lahbib who delivered a message from Tunisian Prime Minister Hamed Al Qurawi inviting Dr. Majali to the meeting of the higher Jordanian-Tunisian joint committee. The committee, headed by the prime ministers of the two countries, will meet in the Tunisian capital Jan. 18, 1995.

WHAT'S GOING ON

The following listings are compiled from monthly bulletins and the daily Arabic press. Readers are advised to verify the listed time and place with the concerned institutions.

CHRISTMAS DISPLAY

☆ **Bani Hamida Christmas Display with a variety of small gift items at Bani Hamida House, Jabal Amman, First Circle, Rainbow Street.**

POETRY RECITAL

☆ **Poetry recital by poet Omar Abu Al Haija at the Phoenix Gallery for Culture and Art on Monday at 6:30 p.m.**

EXHIBITIONS

☆ **Exhibition of oil paintings by Mohammad Musa at the Phoenix Gallery for Culture and Art.**

☆ **Plastic art exhibition by Laila Kawash at the Royal Cultural Centre.**

☆ **Art exhibition by Ammar Khammash and Fuad Mimi at Instituto Cervantes (the Spanish Cultural Centre).**

☆ **Exhibition of works by Mahmud Obaidi at Darat Al Funun. Also showing an exhibition of portraits by Fahrelnissa Zeid and the exhibition of contemporary Arab artists.**

☆ **Exhibition of paintings by Ismail and Tamam Shammout at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation.**

☆ **Exhibition by artists Lattif Al Khateeb and Muhy Khaleefa at the Housing Bank Gallery.**

House begins debate of budget

(Continued from page 1)

The Finance Ministry

— Submission of draft budgets to Parliament before Nov. 15 every year.
— Reduction of duties and taxes on buses and public transport vehicles, including taxis and those used by farmers and contractors.
— Doubling the duty exemptions extended to the civil and military consumers' societies.
— Improving the conditions of ex-servicemen who did not benefit from the government's recent move to increase pensions.
— Submission of the budgets of independent public sector entities in a limited timeframe.

The Ministry of Planning

— Channelling of finances to productive projects that serve to build a strong national economy;
— Rejection of financing terms that benefit foreign parties at the expense of local contractors;
— A close national survey be conducted of all areas of the Kingdom to define the financial, natural and human capabilities and the availability of infrastructure so as to define the areas' investment needs, and priority be given for local workforce.

The Ministry of Public Works

The committee said it had found that allocations for the ministry's projects were distributed over large areas with little amounts of money. It called for:
— The priorities of the ministry's national projects be re-*defined and sufficient funds* be allocated to finish the projects in record time, especially touristic and productive projects.
— Support for the construction sector.
— A fixed percentage of the project cost as labour cost (daily wages).

The Ministry of Water and Irrigation

The committee said it found that the ministry did not spend all the capital allocations for it this year. It recommended that:
— Support be extended to the administrative and technical cadre with qualified scientific and administrative staff to take swift decisions on tenders.
— Routine procedures and bureaucracy and overlappings between the duties of this ministry and the Ministry of Planning be eliminated and revenue collection methods should be improved;
— Due attention be given to dams in areas such as Mujib, Waleh, Wadi Hammad, the Jordan Valley, etc.

The Ministry of Agriculture

— Agricultural production and marketing should be separated and the government should set up a public shareholding company to operate on the basis of the needs of the local market and exports as well as the requirements of the agricultural sector.
— A project to produce packing boxes for produce be revived.
— Speeded-up procedures to transfer farmers' loans from the Jordan Cooperative Bank and the Jordan Cooperative Organisation to the Agricultural Credit Corporation and the exemption of these loans from interest.
— The financial and administrative systems of the Jordan Cooperative Organisation be corrected.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade

— A draft law on encouraging investments to be able to meet the needs of the coming stage and make Jordan an investment-attracting country should be presented before January 1995.
— Support be extended to the Investment Promotion Department and the investment window by giving them additional powers.
— Additional incentives be given to encourage investments in less fortunate areas.
— Support be given to the department of specifications and standardisation.
— An updated companies law should be presented to Parliament in the first half of 1995.
— Completion of the establishment of the Amman International Fair.
— Priority be given, while dealing with ailing companies, to the interest of the company over the interest of the "powers" behind the company.
— Reconstruction of royalty contracts granted to a group of Jordanian companies in a way conforming to the needs of the coming stage and to increase production.

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources:

— A government-owned *national oil company be* established.
— Attention be given to reorganisation of the government's relationship with the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company.

The Ministry of Post and Communications:

— Justified distribution of services and levying of charges in all areas and priority be given to areas without telephone services while deciding where to install new services.
— Special consideration be given to subscription and local charges in the countryside *and the badia.*
— Technical ways be found to fight piracy and international competition by offering distinguished services and competitive prices and to reduce charges in national and religious holidays and evening calls.

The Foreign Ministry:

— Proper personnel who can project a good image of the country and serve national interests be selected to work at embassies abroad and proper equipment be provided to the embassies.

The Ministry of Health

— Support be given to the *health sector by expanding* and improving the condition of hospitals and clinics especially in rural areas, the badia and the Jordan Valley.

The Ministry of Information

— Support be given to the Jordanian satellite channel and its budget be increased.
— Support be given to the Jordan News Agency Petra and the opening of new Petra offices abroad.

The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities

— Hotel training and education be developed.
— The hotel training college be placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism and in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.
— Plans to develop touristic attractions in Jordan and financing be found for them, especially the southern Aqaba beach and the Dead Sea, Petra, and Wadi Musa.

The Ministry of Higher Education

— The community colleges which contribute to increasing unemployment to be converted to vocational colleges and youth be encouraged to enroll in them...
— Support be given to government universities and due attention to Muta and Al al Bait universities since their infrastructure is not completed yet.
— Funds be allocated for scholarships.
— No new licence be issued to private universities with traditional curricula and which do not serve the national economy.

Free zones

— The entire Aqaba region be converted into a free zone.

The Vocational Training Corporation.

— New vocational training centres be opened.

Scientific research

— Financial support be given to scientific research, particularly in terms of income tax and while drafting a new income tax law.

The Jordan Investment Corporation

— The government, through the corporation, direct investments towards establishing government buildings in various areas of the Kingdom and support the housing projects for civil servants.

Compensations

Due attention be given to collect the Gulf war compensations through following up on the issue.

The National Aid Fund

— Sufficient funds be allocated to cover the needs of those under poverty line.

The Development and Employment Fund

— The process of loans for individuals for projects be facilitated and the citizens be informed of the fund's goals.

The Central Bank of Jordan

— The Central Bank of Jordan be brought under the supervision of the Audit Bureau in line with Article 119 of the Constitution even if the process needs legal amendments.

Royal Jordanian

— Attention be given to improving Royal Jordanian's services and modernising the carrier's fleet. The committee *said it appreciated the moves* to privatise the airline.

The Social Security Corporation

— The corporation establish an investment bank since it has enough liquidity.
— The corporation should reconsider its pension structure for beneficiaries.
— The corporation should seriously study health insurance.

The Ministry of Administrative Development

— The committee stressed its earlier recommendations related to developing the administrative system and fighting *nepotism, favouritism* and bureaucracy and amending the allowances system.
— Efficient personnel able to deal with the coming stage be employed.

Other recommendations:

— Cancelling contributions to schools and financially capable students be excluded from exemptions.
— Support for the Armed Forces, the Public Security Department and the Civil Defence Department.
— Studies be held to find means to help citizens who do not have health insurance.
— Attention be given to the link between Jordan's economy and the Palestinian people.
— Arab-Arab and Arab-Islamic links be enhanced in economy, commerce and culture.
— Proper attention be given to senior judges.
— The government focus on means to realise the funds for the supplementary budget (JD 390 million).
— The conditions of civil servants and servicemen be studied and improved through implementing the national housing programme, increasing income, implementing recommendation no. 3 (the Ministry of Finance) and through modernising and updating means of work of the Audit Bureau and the Department of Supplies.

Samir Barhoum contributed to this story.

Russians battle Chechen rebels

(Continued from page 1)

part in such a meeting.

The Russian parliament has appealed to Mr. Yeltsin, the government and opposing forces in Chechenya to stop fighting and begin emergency talks.

Mr. Yeltsin told parliamentary deputies by letter on Friday he would put forward a new plan for settling the conflict, mainly by political methods, in an address to the nation.

Mr. Dudayev, labelling Mr. Yeltsin "a bloodsucker" and "a copy of Stalin," vowed in a newspaper interview on Saturday to fight on until Russian troops pull out of Chechenya.

Asked by the Bild am Sonntag newspaper if he would resume talks with Moscow to end fighting in Chechenya, he said: "No. First all Russian troops must have left our land, then I will be ready to negotiate with the Russian president."

The newspaper released the interview ahead of publication on Sunday.

Mr. Dudayev said the political furor Mr. Yeltsin had unleashed by sending troops into Chechenya made it unlikely Moscow could suppress the separatist revolt and occupy the region.

"I do not think Mosow will succeed in occupying Chechenya," Mr. Dudayev said. "The Russian leadership will not be able to sustain it either politically or militarily.

"Should it succeed, however, we will naturally fight from underground as regular Chechen armed forces, and with all means," he added.

Mr. Dudayev said other Muslims in the volatile Caucasus supported Chechenya's cause.

"Nobody wants a savage, unpredictable and drunken Russian dog in front of his house," he said. "We will fight, and perhaps we will not be there at the end, but I think in that case Russia will not have its president any more, assuming there still is a Russia.

"Practically all the regions want to get away from the bloodsucker in Moscow," he added. "The Russian president is developing more and more into a copy of (Soviet dictator Josef) Stalin and (Russian ultra-nationalist Vladimir) Zhirinovsky."

Mr. Dudayev said he still liked and respected Russians despite the fighting.

His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan Saturday meets with farmers in the northern Jordan Valley Region (Petra photo)

Prince Hassan calls for reconsidering development plans in Jordan Valley

AMMAN (Petra) — His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan Saturday urged ministries and institutions concerned with developing the Jordan Rift Valley to reconsider the valley's development plans.

During a tour of the northern Jordan Valley region, Prince Hassan said the new stage requires that Jordan draws comprehensive plans for all the areas of the Jordan Rift Valley. Such plans, he said, also require that those in charge to contribute to completely changing the ways of thinking and implementation of projects.

Prince Hassan also urged government departments to preserve their credibility and to deal with all projects in a comprehensive manner in that all services be viewed within one integrated framework.

The Crown Prince commenced his tour by visiting Deir Alla town where he was received by the commander of the 12th Royal Mechanised Division. Then Prince Hassan inspected some of the division's units and was briefed on their duties.

Prince Hassan later inspected the conditions of farmers in the Jordan Valley and was acquainted with problems facing them.

Some of the farmers complained of the problem of flies, attributing it to the use of natural fertilisers. The farmers urged government officials to work on solving the problem.

Prince Hassan then inspected work on the Al Ardhi road extending from the north to Al Suweimeh village near the Dead Sea.

The Crown Prince was briefed by Public Works and Housing Minister Abdul Razzaq Ensour and Secretary General of the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) Hashem Shboul on progress of work in the road project.

Prince Hassan urged the JVA to pay more attention to the road networks in the valley, to repair the existing ones and to open new agricultural roads, underlining the need for coordination among the Armed Forces, the Ministry of Public Works and Housing and the JVA in this regard.

After visiting several villages in northern Jordan Valley, Prince Hassan met with officers, participating in a course held at the Royal War College and delivered a lecture on "Contemporary Developments and the Jordanian Initiative."

Prince Hassan dealt with four principles which he said govern the Jordanian initiative at the current stage.

He also dwelt on the relationship between the Great Arab Revolt and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, reviewing the development of the country since the time of the late King Abdullah Ben Al Hussein.

He also briefed the audience, who included officers from Arab countries, on his understanding of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty and the historical context leading to its signing.

The Crown Prince also outlined the role of the mass media at the current stage.

In addition, he briefed the audience on the four principles which he considered as the key to the Jordan initiative at the current stage.

Prince Hassan said the first was the relationship between Jordan and the Middle East region, the second between Jordan and Palestine, the third between Jordan and the Mediterranean region and the fourth between Jordan and the economic conference which will be held in Amman in the first half of 1995.

Prince Hassan was accompanied on the tour by Dr. Ensour, Mr. Shboul and his private advisor Mohammad Al Saqqaf.

Thais to conduct 'city of peace' study

AMMAN (J.T.) — Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Mohammad Adwan announced Saturday that a technical team from Thailand will visit Jordan soon to embark on a study of the implementation of the "city of peace" project in Wadi Araba.

The team will be working in cooperation with the government and the private sector in implementation of a project floated at the Casablanca economic summit recently, said the minister following a meeting he held at his office with a team representing 27 Thai firms operating in the tourism and affiliated industries.

Jordan welcomes any initiatives from any source for investments in the Jordanian tourism sector and attaches a great importance on the project at Wadi Araba where peace was concluded between Jordan and Israel.

The minister said that the Ministry of Tourism would make available all the required information for the success of the project, economically and technically.

Outlining to the visiting Thai team Jordan's tourism projects, the minister spoke in detail about the ministry's programmes for the preservation of the archaeological sites in Jordan noting the sites where potential investment is feasible at present.

Referring to the Casablanca economic meeting the minister said that His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan who addressed the meeting invited international firms to conduct feasibility studies for investments in tourism in the Kingdom.

In line with the Prince's directives, Dr. Adwan said, the ministry is holding contacts with investors and businessmen in countries of southeast Asia like Thailand in order to implement the "city of peace projects" and similar tourist schemes.

Jordan asks U.S. to extradite convict

CAIRO (AFP) — Jordan has asked the United States to extradite a Saudi militant who was sentenced to death in his absence for attacks which left *nine wounded*, Al Sharq Al Awsat newspaper reported on Saturday.

Mohammad Jamal Khalifa was one of 11 fundamentalists condemned to death by the State Security Court last Wednesday for a string of bomb attacks against cinemas in Jordan in 1993, the London-based daily said.

Quoting a Jordanian security source, the paper said contacts were underway between Amman and Washington to "study the possibility of extraditing Khalifa even though the two countries are not linked by an extradition treaty."

A legal delegation travelled to Washington two weeks ago for talks on signing such a convention, the source said.

The Saudi fundamentalist, an Omani and a Jordan were sentenced in their absence by the court.

The eight others who received the death penalty were Jordanian nationals. All 11 *had fought alongside the mujahedeen* or Islamic fighters against Soviet occupation in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

They were found guilty of terrorist conspiracy, possessing explosives and belonging to an illegal organisation. They belonged to a group of 25, all Afghanistan war veterans.

CBJ to get $20m to finance trade

AMMAN (Petra) — The Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) is to obtain a $20 million loan from the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) to help finance Jordan's exports and trade exchanges with the Arab countries, under an agreement signed in Amman Saturday.

Dr. Mohammad Saeed Nabulsi, the CBJ governor, said after the signing ceremony with AMF Director Jasem Manai that Jordan can count on the AMF for loans to help it finance its trade and exports with the Arab states.

Jordan had earlier obtained a $32 million soft loan from the AMF to support its economic reform programme as agreed on with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Dr. Nabulsi said. He said the $20 million loan will no doubt help Jordan compete on the Arab markets and facilitate the marketing of its products.

Dr. Manai said that the AMF would sign other agreements with the Kingdom to help finance its inter-Arab trade operations.

Mr. Manai said that 34 Arab financial institutions support the operations of the AMF and continually supply funds for its operations.

Mr. Manai later left Amman following a three-day visit.

Rao rival quits Indian cabinet, opens split in Congress Party

NEW DELHI (R) — Indian Human Resources Minister Arjun Singh said Saturday he was resigning from Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's government, opening a potentially damaging split within the ruling Congress Party.

Mr. Singh was the fifth cabinet member to leave the government in two weeks. Three ministers linked to scandals were sacked, while Mr. Singh and Civil Supplies Minister A.K. Antony quit on their own initiative.

"I have just at two o'clock sent in my resignation from the Union Cabinet to the prime minister, with a request to forward it forthwith to the president," Mr. Singh, a leading rival of Mr. Rao within the ruling Congress Party, told a news conference.

Both Mr. Rao and President Shanker Dayal Sharma must accept Mr.Singh's resignation for it to take effect.

Mr. Singh's decision was the clearest sign yet of a gaping split within Congress between Mr. Rao's loyalists and a group of dissidents upset over the prime minister's leadership and his handling of two scandals.

Mr. Singh was widely believed to be considering mounting a challenge to Mr. Rao's leadership in the event that Congress, which was routed in recent state elections, suffered defeat in another set of state polls in February.

He said in his resignation letter to Mr. Rao that most Congress leaders were disillusioned with the premier's handling of dissent within the Congress.

"The disillusionment with the leadership today is so all-pervasive that the same Congress Party in parliament which elected you as its leader, today is denied an opportunity to meet for fear of members voicing their concern about these very issues," Mr. Singh said. His letter was distributed to reporters.

He added, however: "I must clearly tell you that in no way am I running away from my duty to the country and to the Congress, in that order.

"The Congress is the only party which can strengthen the country."

On Thursday the presidential palace announced the resignations of Health Minister B. Shankaranand, Food Minister Kalpnath Rai and Junior Rural Development Minister Rameshwar Thakur.

A parliamentary report accused Mr. Shankaranand and Mr. Thakur of wrongdoing in a $1.3-billion stock market scandal in 1992. Mr. Rai was criticised in an official report on a sugar import scam.

Mr. Antony, also named in the sugar scandal, stepped down last week. Mr. Rao at first had refused to accept his resignation on the grounds that the minister had done nothing wrong.

In his resignation letter, Mr. Singh suggested the creation of a committee headed by a sitting Supreme Court judge to investigate the 1992 stock market scandal, PTI said.

Mr. Singh also suggested that the government's economic liberalisation programme should be brought into line with people's aspirations and that the privatisation of state-owned firms should be investigated, the news agency said.

"The Congress is roughly divided between those who want Rao to go and those want him to sack Arjun Singh," a senior minister, who declined to be named, told Reuters.

The Asian Age newspaper quoted an opinion poll as saying a majority of Congress deputies were still behind Mr. Rao, although they were not happy with his handling of the party's affairs and criticism of his ministers over recent scandals.

The former cabinet minister said Congress should apologies for the demolition of a mosque by Hindu extremists in Ayodhya in 1992, PTI said.

Many Muslims switched to the opposition centrist groups after December 1992, when Mr. Rao failed to stop a Hindu mob from razing a 400-year-old mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya.

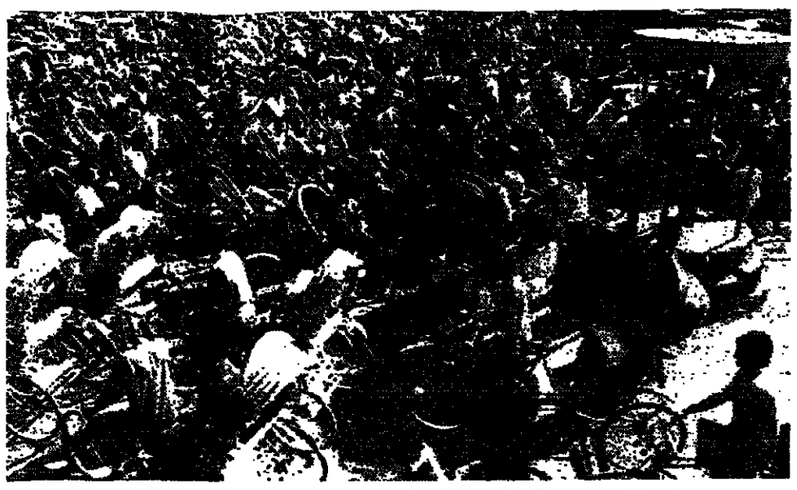
Mr. Rao had promised to rebuild the mosque but Muslim leaders say there were no signs he would.

Lower-caste Hindus have also switched loyalties from Congress, mainly due to a centrist opposition campaign to give them more job quotas in government units.

Some newspapers said Mr. Singh had gained the support of Sonia Gandhi, the charismatic but reclusive Italian-born widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and member of India's most important political family.

Rajiv Gandhi's mother Indira Gandhi and her father Jawaharlal Nehru were Congress premiers, credited with winning elections on their personal appeal.

Congress has ruled the country for all but three years since independence from Britain in 1947. The 109-year-old party has a history of splits, two of them under Indira Gandhi.



Three-wheeler pedicabs crowd Gulistan area causing traffic jams as they fled extremist picketers who were themselves chased by police. Police fought with supporters of the Combined Action Council — an alliance of 13 fundamental and extreme rightwing groups — who enforced a "siege" of Dhaka to push 11 demands including calls for stricter observance of Islamic Laws (AFP photo)

50 hurt during Bangladesh blockade

DHAKA (R) — Nearly 50 people were injured Saturday in clashes between police and Bangladesh opposition activists enforcing a nationwide blockade of railways, roads and waterways, witnesses said.

They said police used batons and tear gas to try to disperse protesters halting trains at Tongi, north of Dhaka.

Trains left Dhaka and other cities early Saturday but most were stopped on the way by stick-wielding and stone-throwing mobs.

Many wore headbands and clashed with police and paramilitary forces, witnesses said.

Opposition parties planned the blockade to last from dawn to dusk. But main opposition leader Sheikh Hasina Friday ordered it to be scaled back to accommodate Christmas celebrations for the country's small Christian community.

The blockade organisers, the Awami League led by Mrs. Hasina and its allies the Jatiya Party and Jamaat-E-Islami, claimed complete success. They said Dhaka was virtually cut off.

Witnesses said inter-city buses and lorries failed to leave Dhaka's three terminals as hundreds of opposition activists barricaded exits. Transport within Bangladeshi cities and river ferries were partially disrupted.

The blockade was intended to put further pressure on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to accept by Tuesday an opposition demand for early elections under a neutral caretaker administration.

Mrs. Khaleda has rejected the demand as unconstitutional. The next elections are not due until 1996.

Mr. Hasina said opposition members, who have boycotted parliament since February, would resign from the legislature en masse unless Mrs. Khaleda met Tuesday's deadline.

OAU chief appeals for peace in troubled Africa

ADDIS ABABA (R) — The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) chief appealed Saturday for peace in the world's most troubled continent in 1995, reflecting on a year that saw Rwanda's genocide and Nelson Mandela's victory in South Africa.

"The world is tired of our unending conflicts, where hundreds of thousands of people were hacked and butchered in a most gruesome manner in 1994," said OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim in a New Year message.

"For almost a decade-and-a-half, the condition of the African has grown progressively worse," Mr. Salim said in the message published at his Addis Ababa headquarters.

Africa faces problems on an apocalyptic scale, with 16 nations involved in a conflict of some kind, producing millions of refugees and a breakdown of state institutions.

Living standards are as bad as they were three decades ago in most countries, and even the dividends of economic reforms may not keep pace with population growth and environmental degradation.

The beacon of hope, not just for agonised Africa but for an entire world in a new era of small wars, poor leadership and economic uncertainty, was the election of Nelson Mandela in April's elections in South Africa.

"The election of Mandela and the victory against apartheid in South Africa crowns the work of the OAU in the field of decolonisation," Mr. Salim said.

The end of 400 years of white rule in southern Africa could signal a brighter future for the region if Mozambique and Angola can prevent a return to civil war and countries build up a new economic coalition.

"An African state, however big it may be, could not survive the growing competition on its own," Mr. Salim said.

He condemned the international community for not taking action to prevent the bloodbath in Rwanda, where the former Hutu rump government butchered hundreds of thousands of Tutsis.

"The world watched from the sidelines as genocide was being perpetrated as each day the helpless children were torn limb from limb," said Mr. Salim.

The United Nations, having failed to stop the importation of weapons or detect the signals that fighting was about to erupt, cut its force in Rwanda from 2,500 to 450 when the killings started in April.

The international community, including the OAU and African nations, then dithered as the bodies piled up in churches and washed down Rwanda's rivers and only intervened after the war was effectively over.

Mr. Salim also described 1994 as a "lost year" for Somalia, abandoned to the warlords and their clan militias by the foreign troops who went there two years ago to save it from famine.

He praised Ghanaian President Jerry Rawlings, who has produced a modest economic miracle in his country, for brokering a new peace pact between Liberia's rival factions this month.

Looking to the future, Mr. Salim pleaded with Burundi's Tutsi and Hutu leaders to heed the tragedy in neighbouring Rwanda and prevent extremism from leading the country to a similar fate.

Tens of thousands of Hutus and Tutsis were killed after the murder of Burundi's popularly-elected President Melchior Ndadaye last year. The violence has sputtered on but could escalate.

Mr. Salim did not mention Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and an economic giant that has gone off the rails.

Many fear Nigeria faces a political crisis of frightening proportions in the coming year if the row between the ruling military and civilian, prodemocratic forces is not resolved.

Truce reached in southern Philippines

COTABATO, Philippines (R) — Troops and Muslim separatist guerrillas in the southern Philippines announced a Christmas ceasefire Saturday and said they would resume peace talks.

Army Brigadier General Renato Garcia and Gadzali Gaafar, political affairs chairman of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), told reporters they had ordered their forces to ceasefire and talks would resume Monday.

Sixteen soldiers and 22 MILF rebels have been killed in the fighting in North Cotabato province on Mindanao Island over the past week, armed forces chief General Arturo Enrile said Friday.

A top Muslim rebel leader had earlier Saturday urged Manila to withdraw its troops.

Nur Misuari, leader of the mainstream Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), said in a radio interview that Islamic nations viewed the army offensive with suspicion.

"I am urging the Armed Forces of the Philippines to immediately withdraw from Moro Islamic Liberation Front-controlled (MILF) areas," he said.

The MILF is a breakaway faction of the MNLF, the main Muslim group seeking limited self-rule in the south of the mainly Christian Philippines.

U.S. may allow Cuban news bureaus

WASHINGTON (R) — The Clinton administration is considering allowing Cuba to open news bureaus in the United States and clearing the way for U.S. news media to establish offices on the island, according to two Florida lawmakers.

Republican members of Congress Lincoln Diaz-Balart and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen have written to President Bill Clinton warning him that "any friendly gesture" towards Cuba's Communist government would be "throwing the moribund totalitarian regime a lifeline."

They listed among other under steps under consideration, plans to authorise U.S. businesses to engage in the unrestricted sale and financing of medicine and medical supplies, lifting the ban on charter flights, and allowing travel for academic, cultural or scientific exchanges.

The White House had no immediate comment on reports that some of the moves could be announced within 10 days.

After Havana expelled the last U.S. correspondent based in Cuba 25 years ago, the United States shut down Cuba's U.S. bureaus except at the United Nations. Reporters have since had to apply for visas on a temporary case-by-case basis.

Reuters maintains a bureau in the Cuban capital.

Mr. Diaz-Balart and Mr. Ros-Lehtinen urged Mr. Clinton "to remain firm in enforcement of sanctions against the Cuban dictatorship.

"Any... friendly gesture toward Castro at this time of almost unprecedented repression would constitute a form of complicity with the ferocious oppression of the Cuban Communist dictatorship against its people," their letter said.

U.S. 'secretly buys' Russian missile parts

NEW YORK (R) — In a deal financed secretly by the Pentagon, the U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency has acquired components of the S-300, the Russian equivalent of the Patriot missile defence system, the New York Times reported Saturday.

The operation to obtain the S-300 was a secret mission paid for with classified financing, the newspaper said, citing government officials, arms dealers and defence analysts.

The broker was the Virginia-based BDM International, whose chairman is Frank Carlucci, former President Ronald Reagan's defence secretary and national security adviser, the paper said.

A Russian-made AN-124 aircraft delivered the S-300 missile system components this week to Huntsville, Alabama, where the Missile and Space Intelligence Centre of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) is located, the New York Times said.

The DIA is the Pentagon's chief intelligence branch.

The operation to acquire the equipment began two years ago when BDM won a lucrative and secret Pentagon competition to acquire the S-300 for U.S. intelligence agencies, which want to study the weapons system, the paper said.

The S-300 is the rough equivalent of the Patriot system that was designed to shoot down Iraq's Scud missles during the Gulf War in 1991, the paper said. It added that Russian generals say it is better than the Patriot, though it said American officials dispute that.

The paper said BDM apparently acquired the S-300 components in Belarus.

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko had said that the former Soviet republic had sold one of the S-300 systems, although to whom, for what price and on what basis remained unsaid, the New York Times said.

Belarus deputies demand lifting of censorship

MINSK (R) — The Belarussian parliament has asked President Alexander Lukashenko to lift a media blackout on high-level corruption allegations levelled by a parliament deputy.

The parliamentary newspaper, Belarus's largest daily, Friday was forbidden from publishing and three other newspapers were issued with white blocks where stories had been pulled.

The newspapers had intended to report on a sweeping corruption probe presented to parliament this week by Deputy Sergei Antonchik.

Parliament's resolution Friday did not accuse Mr. Lukashenko — who campaigned on a pledge to root out corruption — of ordering the censorship. But many deputies directly pointed fingers at the president.

"This is the start of the creation of a police state," Deputy Boris Gunter told the chamber.

"Let's be honest. This is all coming from the president," said another deputy, Vladimir Gribanov.

The resolution asked Mr. Lukashenko to take action against officials who pulled articles and newspaper and sack the head of state radio and television.

It also asked him to "take decisive measures on protecting the rights and freedoms of Belarussian citizens" and order the prosecutor general to investigate the incidents.

Those implicated in Mr. Antonchik's report, including Prime Minister Mikhail Chigir and Defence Minister Anatoly Kostenko, have denied the allegations.

Canada's Christmas message to U.S.: Don't mess with our culture

OTTAWA (Agencies) — There was no seasonal goodwill in this week's message to the United States from Canada.

Essentially, Canadian Heritage Minister Michel Dupuy said the United States could have as much free trade as it wanted — as long as it did not involve what Canadians regard as a growing incursion on their culture by the Americans.

Mr. Dupuy announced a series of measures designed to make it more difficult for Americans to trade in Canada.

But this wasn't a case of free trade — or a denial of free trade — according to Mr. Dupuy. It was a question of culture.

His measures would:

— Slap an 80 per cent tax on advertisement in so-called "split editions" — Canadian editions of U.S. magazines,

— Make broadcasters pay royalties to performers and production companies when their songs are played on Canadian radio — on top of royalties already due to composers, songwriters and music publishers — with the money earmarked for a special fund to support Canadian performers and production companies,

— Make bars and restaurants pay royalties for music played in their establishments, again with the money going into a special fund to support Canadian performers and production companies, and

— Place a levy on every blank audio tape sold in Canada — with the proceeds going to Canadian musicians and recording companies as a form of compensation for loss of revenues caused by Canadians taping music from the radio at home.

Mr. Dupuy also said he would not countermand a decision by Canada's broadcasting regulatory body to order cable television distributors to replace the U.S. Country Music Television network with a new Canadian country music station.

Mr. Dupuy's announcements brought a howl of protests from the U.S. government, the publishers of Sports Illustrated magazine and the owners of Country Music Television.

Sports Illustrated sparked a row last year with the launch of its co-called Canadian edition. The magazine had found a loophole in existing Canadian law that effectively bans Canadian advertisers from tax benefits for advertising to Canadian audiences in U.S. publications.

The row deepened when a Sports Illustrated editor in New York refused to allow the Canadian edition to carry an advertisement featuring a naked Canadian soccer team with each player strategically covering his genitals with a soccer ball.

This, said critics of Sports Illustrated, was proof that the "Canadian edition" was still very much under U.S. control.

The Country Music Television row is more complicated as one of its main shareholders is the Westinghouse electronics group, which has been operating in Canada for a hundred years and employs thousands of Canadians.

Westinghouse spokesman Maury Lane complained that the decision to bump his television network off Canadian cable was in breach of the North American Free Trade Agreement and did not take into account that Westinghouse was a major Canadian company in its own right.

Meanwhile, an opinion poll published Friday showed most Canadians in English-speaking regions of the country believe in a hardline approach toward Quebec if the province votes for independence, according to an opinion poll published Friday.

However, the survey by Angus Reid Group also found a slim majority of Quebeckers themselves would vote against sovereignty for the French-speaking province.

"Clearly, the sovereignist forces face some difficult challenges as the debate moves to this next critical phase — challenges that come both from within and outside of Quebec," Angus Reid said in a commentary on the findings.

Earlier this week, Prime Minister Jean Chretien said it would be illegal for Quebec to separate from the rest of the country. "It's completely illegal and unconstitutional," he said in a television interview.

Quebec's separatist Parti Quebecois government says it will hold a referendum on separation from the rest of Canada next year.

McCurry to replace Myers at White House

WASHINGTON (AP) — State Department spokesman Michael McCurry, an experienced Democratic operative, will take over as President Bill Clinton's press secretary early next year, a White House official said. Mr. McCurry, 49, will replace Dee Dee Myers, who was Mr. Clinton's spokeswoman during his election campaign and held the press secretary's job for the first two years of his administration. Mr. McCurry's appointment had been widely anticipated. But details of the transition were not confirmed until Friday. White House aide Mark Gearan, a former White House communications director, will serve as acting press secretary over the next few weeks until Mr. McCurry begins the job, said an administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity. White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta will formally announce Mr. McCurry's appointment, along with other staff changes, the official said. Ms. Myers, 33, the first female chief press secretary at the White House, announced her resignation last week from the post paying more than $100,000 a year. Mr. Panetta tried to ease her out of the office in September, but Ms. Myers appealed to Mr. Clinton and won a reprieve and a promotion. Thursday was her last day on the job. The photograph shows Ms. Myers (right) is embraced by President Clinton during her last briefing as press secretary (AFP photo)

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QE2 finally leaves New York

NEW YORK (R) — The QE2 luxury liner, held by the U.S. Coast Guard for safety reasons, finally was allowed to leave for its Caribbean Christmas cruise Saturday — 37 hours late. The trouble-plagued ship had been barred from quitting port after inspectors found numerous fire and safety violations aboard. The vessel pulled from the dock on the East River after 1 a.m. (0600 GMT) in a whipping rainstorm and was headed for 60-knot, gale-force winds off the U.S. east coast, according to the Coast Guard. Coast Guard Boatswain's Mate Gerry Gaffney told Reuters that the ship had been released and "if they had problems, the vessel would not have been allowed to leave." Some passengers had gone aboard Thursday evening for a Caribbean cruise via Florida that was scheduled to start at noon Thursday. They took the place of others who had arrived in New York earlier that day after a disaster-filled Atlantic crossing. Angry passengers said they had a nightmarish voyage from England. They said toilets flooded, running water turned brown and debris spilled into the corridors. Coast Guard inspectors boarded the liner Thursday evening near Ambrose Lighthouse, in New York Harbour, and began what they called a "routine inspection."

Fergie finds home for new year

LONDON (AP) — The Duchess of York won't be going homeless in the new year after all. The former Sarah Ferguson and her two daughters, 6-year-old Princess Beatrice and 4-year-old Princess Eugenie, have found an eight-bedroom mansion in Sorrey that is worth £1 million ($1.6 million), according to the news agency Press Association. The rent is reported to be £1,500 ($2,400) per month, but Press Association said that the duchess, who is separated from her husband Prince Andrew, apparently will still be looking for a place to buy. The duchess, popularly known as "Fergie," most vacate the house she now rents by the end of January. She recently told reporters in Washington that she could not afford to purchase a suitable home.

Actor Christian Slater held on weapons charge

NEW YORK (R) — Actor Christian Slater was arrested at John F. Kennedy International Airport after he tried to board a flight carrying an unlicensed 9mm handgun, police said. Mr. Slater, who stars in the current hit film Interview With The Vampire, was arrested Friday afternoon after he set off a metal detector while trying to board a Delta Airlines flight, Sergeant John Mariano said. Slater was charged with criminal possession of a weapon and was being held overnight, Sgt. Mariano said.

New AIDS test uses saliva

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The U.S. government has announced that approval had been granted to a new AIDS virus test which uses saliva from the mouth instead of blood. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said that in tests, the oral fluid collection system had a two per cent error factor in both positive and negative results — higher than the standard blood test. The FDA said that the new test will be available only from physicians and administered only by people trained in its use. The test involves placing a specially-treated cotton pad on a stick between the lower gum and the cheek and allowing it to absorb fluid. The stick is then placed into a plastic container with a preservative solution. One advantage of the new test according to Jeff Lawrence, a consultant to the American Foundation for AIDS, was that it could encourage people who dislike blood tests to be tested for HIV, the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS. "As long as a positive test is followed up with a blood test and as long as there is appropriate counseling available, it is a reasonable thing to do," Mr. Lawrence said. The oral fluid collection system is marketed by the Epitope Corp. of Beaverton, Oregon under the brand name Orasure.

A resident of Sarajevo walks in a snow-covered cemetery in the Bosnian capital (AFP photo)

Fighting continues in Bihac as Bosnian ceasefire begins

SARAJEVO (R) — A ceasefire on which the United Nations hoped to build peace in Bosnia began Saturday but Croatian Serbs and rebel Muslims who did not sign the deal continued to attack the beleaguered Bihac enclave.

U.N. peacekeepers said fighting between Bosnian Serbs and Muslim-led Bosnian government forces fell dramatically in the 24 hours before the ceasfire took effect at noon (1100 GMT).

The capital Sarajevo was peaceful despite three shots which rang out on the city's notorious "sniper alley" seven minutes after the deadline but caused no casualties.

Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic signed a seven-day ceasefire with the U.N. Friday and agreed to negotiate a four-month "cessation of hostilities" by Jan. 1.

If the ceasefire succeeds in halting almost 33 months of war, talks will resume on a big power peace plan to divide the country between Serbs and a federation of Muslims and Croats.

A trail of broken Bosnian ceasefires in the past prompted caution on the part of the big power contact group — the United States, Russia, Britain, France and Germany — promoting the plan.

The group said in a statement that talks would start only when the U.N. verified the ceasefire was working and the Serbs accepted the peace plan as a starting point for negotiations.

The U.N. always knew the northwestern enclave of Bihac was the weak link in the ceasefire agreed after mediation by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter who was invited to Bosnia by Mr. Karadzic this week in an effort to break months of deadlock in the peace process.

The Muslim enclave has been the theatre of heavy fighting since October when government 5th Corps used it as a springboard to attack Bosnian Serbs.

The Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) counter-attacked with the help of neighbouring Croatian Serbs and rebel Muslims loyal to local warlord Fikret Abdic and opposed to Mr. Izetbegovic.

Although BSA commander General Ratko Mladic signed the ceasefire, the Croatian Serbs and Mr. Abdic's forces were not even invited to follow suit.

Ed Jospeh, a U.N. official in the Bihac enclave, said Croatian Serbs and Abdic forces fought with the 5th Corps Saturday south of Velika Kladusa, a town they captured earlier this month.

Bosnian Serb radio, quoting Mr. Abdic's Velikaton Radio, said the rebel Muslims were pressing south to "liberate the whole of western Bosnia."

The fighting hampered the movement of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) aid including a food convoy for the enclave's 180,000 people which left Zagreb Thursday.

But Bihac is essentially a sideshow compared with the broader war and diplomatic struggle between Bosnian Serbs and the Sarajevo government.

Mr. Karadzic ordered his forces to stop fighting Friday and U.N. spokesman Thant Myint-U said there was "a dramatic drop in military activity throughout Bosnia yesterday."

Among the last victims were three children killed in the northern Muslim town of Gradacac by shelling Friday in which four other people were wounded.

Mr. Thant said: "We are becoming satisfied but the ceasefire is something that can be broken any day. We want a much more differentiated cessation of hostilities which should be signed within the next week. After that, we have to move very quickly towards trying to get a political settlement."

The ceasefire agreement was boiled down to its essentials to remove issues over which the Serbs and Muslims have been wrangling for months.

These will be tackled as negotiators aim for a cessation of hostilities, under which U.N. peacekeepers will be deployed between the warring sides, by Jan. 1.

They include a Muslim withdrawal from the demilitarised zone on Mount Igman west of Sarajevo, the demilitarisation of Muslim enclaves on Serb territory and the exchange of prisoners of war and information about missing people.

The status of the peace plan, giving 51 per cent of Bosnia to the Muslim-Croat Federation and the rest to Serbs, will also be crucial.

Serbs reject the plan's amputation of much of their territory and economic resources and regard it merely as starting point for peace talks. Muslims insist it must be the basis for a settlement.

In Brussels, NATO Secretary General Willy Claes said in an interview any evacuation of the U.N. troops in Bosnia would be complex and bloody.

Mr. Claes told the Dutch magazine Elsevier, in an intervier released Friday, that withdrawing the U.N. Protection Force (UNPROFOR) would internationalise the conflict and "would probably open the door to a parade of Muslim troops."

He said the U.N. must stay in Bosnia until there was a peaceful solution to the territorial conflict pitting Bosnian Serbs against the mainly Muslim Bosnian government.

"Withdrawing the European blue helmets would lead to an entirely uncontrollable situation," Mr. Claes said.

Military chiefs of countries contributing UNPROFOR troops met in the Hague this week to devise ways to shore up the increasingly arduous mission which faces widespread harassment. Some peacekeepers have been killed and others kidnapped.

At the same time, NATO has made contingency plans to send in a big force to evacuate UNPROFOR troops if their task becomes impossible, but NATO allies have recently played down the likelihood of a pullout, stressing instead the dire consequences of such a step.

Mr. Claes acknowledged that cracks had appeared in the Transatlantic alliance over policy on Bosnia, and said this was the result of contradictions between the roles of peacekeeper and peacemaker.

But the said the fundamental solidarity of the links between the United States and its European NATO partners was not undermined by friction over Bosnia policy.

U.S. general delivers regrets in bid to free pilot

SEOUL (R) — The U.S. military, making last-ditch efforts to free by Christmas a helicopter pilot held in North Korea, Saturday promised steps to prevent U.S. aircraft from violating North Korean airspace.

North Korea did not respond to a U.S. request for a meeting to discuss the return of the pilot at the Korean border village of Panmunjom, a U.S. military spokesman said.

"It appears there will be no meeting today," he said.

General Gary Luck, commander of 37,000 U.S. troops in South Korea, earlier sent a letter to North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il via Panmunjom expressing regret at the intrusion by the U.S. army helicopter a week ago, a U.S. military official said.

The OH-58 reconnaissance helicopter strayed several miles into North Korean territory a week ago and Pyongyang said its troops shot it down.

The helicopter's pilot Bobby Hall was captured in the downing while his co-pilot David Hilemon, was killed. Officer Hall is still being held in the North and being questioned about the intrusion.

"General Luck expressed regrets at this unfortunate incident and pledged measures to prevent similar incidents in the future," said the official, who asked not to be identified.

The general also thanked North Korea for returning the body of Officer Hilemon Thursday through Panmunjom.

"There's no breakthrough to announce as yet," a U.S. diplomat said Saturday morning. "But we are using all avenues to talk to North Korea for a quick release of the pilot.

"We are still hopeful North Korea will free Hall by Christmas (on Sunday)," he added.

U.S. officials said Pyongyang, which has said the helicopter was on a spy mission, had given no assurances Officer Hall would be released by Christmas.

The Pentagon said the helicopter mistakenly crossed the border and the crew thought they were still in South Korea minutes before they went down.

South Korea's Yonhap domestic news agency, quoting a U.S. military official, said earlier Saturday that North Korea had agreed in principle to release Officer Hall through Panmunjom on Christmas Day.

Jim Coles, a U.S. military spokesman in Seoul, denied the report. "To my knowledge it is not true. And my knowledge is pretty in-depth," he said.

Yonhap later carried an unsourced report saying the United States and North Korea had failed to agree on the release.

In Officer Hall's home town of Brooksville, Florida, local people put out yellow ribbons symbolising the wish for a homecoming.

North Korea has said Officer Hall could be released only after a thorough investigation.

U.S. Congressman Bill Richardson, who negotiated in the past week in Pyongyang for the release of Officer Hall and of Officer Hilemon's body, said in Washington Friday: "I pushed hard for Christmas as a humanitarian gesture. The clock is ticking."

Mr. Richardson said he told President Bill Clinton Officer Hall would be released "very soon" and that there was "a decent chance that he would be released before Christmas."

North Korea said it hoped to resolve the problem of releasing the airman on a "humanitarian basis" but refused to specify when Officer Hall would be freed.

"They realise that if the issue is not resolved fairly quickly relations will be damaged," Mr. Richardson said.

He said the North Koreans showed no remorse for the downing of the helicopter or the death of Officer Hilemon. "Remorse is not part of their culture... their security is paramount."

U.S. officials say that if the issue drags on it could undermine recent diplomatic progress, in which Washington struck a deal aimed at ending North Korea's alleged nuclear weapons programme in exchange for the provision of modern nuclear reactors costing $4 billion.

Tutsi party pulls out of Burundi government

BUJUMBURA (Agencies) — Burundi's main Tutsi political party announced Saturday that it was pulling out of the power-sharing government amid an outburst of ethnic violence between Tutsis and majority Hutus.

Charles Mukasi, president of the Tutsi-dominated Union for National Progress (UPRONA), said the party was quitting the power-sharing government in protest over the recent appointment of a contested Hutu politician as speaker of the National Assembly.

UPRONA accuses the speaker, Jean Minani, of having urged Hutus to kill Tutsis following the assassination by the Tutsi-led military of Hutu President Melchior Ndadaye in October 1993 during an unsuccessful coup attempt.

Some 50,000 Burundians, mostly Tutsis, were killed in the violence that followed that assassination.

But Mr. Mukasi acknowledged that some of UPRONA's members in the government, who include Prime Minister Anatole Kanyenkiko and six other cabinet ministers, were resisting party orders that they resign.

"Those ministers who have not yet handed in their resignations must do so now," he said, adding that the portfolios are attributed to UPRONA under a power-sharing agreement with the Hutu-led Front for Democracy in Burundi in September.

Talks on resolving the crisis were continuing Saturday, officials said.

The UPRONA move came amid an outburst of fighting between Tutsi and Hutu militias which has left dozens dead and wounded over the past week and revived fears that Burundi was headed to the same ethnic carnage which left between 500,000 and one million dead, again mostly Tutsis, in neighbouring Rwanda.

That war broke out after the Hutu presidents of both countries were killed when their plane crashed in mysterious circumstances in the Rwandan capital Kigali on April 6.

The two countries have the same racial mix, about 80 per cent Hutu and 20 per cent Tutsi.

Mr. Mukasi called on UPRONA militants and the general population to remain peaceful despite the political crisis.

State radio reported Saturday that three grenades exploded in Bwiza, the capital Bujumbura's northwest suburb where up to 30 people were killed in clashes earlier this week.

At least one person was injured in the explosions.

In the suburb of Buyenzi, two corpses with gunshot and bayonet wounds were discovered in the market. It was not clear when the victims had been killed.

Authorities said Friday they would try to persuade people to return to their homes in Bwiza and soldiers were allowing residents in but nobody out of the district, where looting of empty houses and shops had broken out.

But on Saturday, Hutus from Bwiza said they wanted to take refuge in Buyenzi, a district inhabited mainly by their clansmen. Zairean expatriates in the area said they were returning to their country.

Violence has generally eased since the military began enforcing a dusk-to-dawn curfew Thursday night, but gunshots could still be heard overnight in the squalid, Hutu-dominated quarter of Kamenge — a stronghold for hardline militias.

Security forces denied any involvement. "We don't know at what or who the Kamenge people shot," an officer from the mainly Tutsi army patrolling Kamenge said.

"It is useless asking people for information in this district because there is a code of silence. Anyone who is seen talking to the army or strangers is a traitor and traitors are shot at night," he told Reuters.

Outside the northern areas, most of the city has been quiet and people have been returning to work in the last two days.

State radio said President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya and his ruling party called late Friday for talks on the crisis with its main Tutsi opposition party, UPRONA.

The current crisis was apparently sparked by the Dec. 1 election of Jean Minani, a Hutu much disliked by the Tutsi opposition, to the post of parliamentary speaker.

On Thursday, the U.N. Security Council called for a halt to violence in Burundi, fearing a repeat of the mass killings that gripped neighbouring Rwanda earlier this year.

Fire destroys Karachi garment market

KARACHI (AFP) — An overnight fire gutted more than 300 shops in a second-hand clothing market in Pakistan's commercial hub of Karachi, already reeling from months of political and ethnic violence, witnesses and merchants said.

More than 320 small hut-like shops and 13 large shops, all selling imported second-hand clothes, were destroyed in the three-hour blaze, said the president of a society of traders in the affected Social Security Market.

Ghulam Jalil said the fire, which started late Friday when all the shops were closed, caused losses worth millions of dollars.

The cause of the fire in the Banaras Colony in north Karachi was not known, but came several hours after a clash in the area between police and a group left at least two people dead.

Witnesses said police opened fire on a group accompanying a newly married couple after a wedding, but a police official said a friend of the groom had fired first.

Firing into the air in celebration is common at marriage processions here, and residents said this could have accidentally triggered the clash.

Later, people in the tense area burned old tyres on the streets and erected barricades.

Nearly 700 people have been killed in Karachi, the country's largest city and financial centre, this year in violence linked to political, ethnic and sectarian problems.

In Islamabad, an official spokesman renewed Pakistani allegations that foreign agents were involved in the violence in Karachi, after police found the bodies of four paramilitary soldiers who were kidnapped Thursday.

The gruesome murder of the rangers "substantiated apprehensions that there is a foreign hand behind (the) continuation of violence" in the port city, he said.

The spokesman did not name India, but Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and other Pakistani officials have directly accused New Delhi of fomenting trouble in Karachi in retaliation for Islamabad's support for separatists in India's Kashmir region.

Scalfaro wins support on solving crisis

ROME (R) — Italin President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro Saturday won increasing support from the Northern League and the opposition for plans to steer Italy towards fresh elections, but not on Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's terms.

Mr. Scalfaro, refusing to bendi to Mr. Berlusconi's demands for snap elections, wants to proceed with caution and make sure a new electoral system is in place before Italians vote again.

He believes the elections Berlusconi is demanding would be "a catastrophe" for the country, according to Interior Minister Roberto Maroni, a member of the federalist Northern League.

"The president's thinking is that elections should take place only after parliament has written the rules," said Mr. Maroni Friday after a meeting with the president.

Mr. Scalfaro, the supreme arbiter in Italian political crises, must decide whether to dissolve parliament and call immediate elections or seek a successor to Mr. Berlusconi to head Italy's 54th government since World War II.

The prime minister, who resigned Thursday rather than face defeat in a no-confidence vote sponsored by the league, wants elections as soon as possible under the existing system.

Italians voted last March under a new first-past-the-post system which left a quarter of the 945 seats in the two houses of parliament distributed by proportional representation.

Most political groups agree the hybrid system did not produce the clear result they hoped for and needs refining.

Mr. Berlusconi said he is hoping to win Mr. Scalfaro over "with a series of arguments."

Umberto Bossi, the leader of the League and Mr. Berlusconi's former ally who led the revolt that brought down the five-party coalition, said he firmly supported Mr. Scalfaro.

"Right now, there is room only for an institutional government that can draw up new electoral rules," Mr. Bossi told state radio. "We cannot go to elections under the old rules."

Massimo D'Alema, head of the opposition ex-communist Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), said Saturday in an interview with a private Italian radio station that snap elections were out of the question.

"We cannot destroy the country because of Berlusconi's hatred of Bossi, because he wants to punish him," he said.

The leaders of Italy's main trades' unions have also said they are opposed to early elections.

But Mr. Berlusconi said he gave Mr. Scalfaro a clear message at his resignation meeting that he should remain as caretaker prime minister in the run-up to polls which he is reported to want by late March or early April.

Mr. Scalfaro began formal consultations Friday, meeting his two surviving predecessors, Giovanni Leone and Francesco Cossiga.

Meanwhile, the neo-fascist National Alliance, a key component of the outgoing Italian government, has no plans for taking over the premiership after the resignation of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the party's leader said Friday.

Expressing support for Mr. Berlusconi, Gianfranco Fini said no politician from the National Alliance or the Northern League could become prime minister because the government's central base continued to be the premier's Forza Italia party.

Sri Lankan rebels blow up bus, 5 soldiers killed

COLOMBO (AFP) — Tamil guerrillas Saturday blew up a bus carrying security forces in eastern Sri Lanka, killing at least five soldiers despite government plans to celebrate a New Year truce, military sources said.

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) guerrillas exploded a landmine under the bus transporting troops between two army camps in the coastal Batticaloa district, killing the five soldiers and wounding 20 others.

"So far we know that five of our men have died. About 20 are injured. There had been no firing by the Tigers after the attack. It seems to have been just a single mine," a military source said.

No further details were immediately available about the Christmas Eve LTTE strike but military sources said that soldiers had launched a major hunt for LTTE guerrillas in nearby jungle following the attack.

The latest attack came as the government awaited a response from the LTTE to a "reciprocal cessation of hostilities" before the resumption of a second round of peace talks next week.

This was the worst attack on security forces since Chandrika Kumaratunga became president in a landslide victory at presidential polls on Nov. 9.

To mark her inauguration as president, the LTTE declared a seven-day unofficial ceasefire and eventually scaled down its attacks on security forces.

Mrs. Kumaratunga initiated peace talks with the LTTE shortly after leading her People's Alliance to victory at the August parliamentary polls despite strong criticism from hardliners in her majority Sinhalese community and the military.

However, in recent weeks, the militants have stepped up attacks on government forces, including a 45-minute mortar barrage Tuesday on the forward defences of the Karainagar Navy Base, killing a sailor.

The military has claimed virtual control of the sprawling eastern province after ridding the region of LTTE guerrillas two years ago. But the militants have been able to harrass troops with hit-and-run attacks from jungle bases.

The government had hoped for a Christmas ceasefire but a second round of talks scheduled for earlier in the week were delayed after LTTE criticism of Information Secretary Lionel Fernando, one of four government negotiators.

Information Minister Dharmasiri Senanayake told reporters earlier that communications were continuing between the two sides for "a cessation of hostilities" and for clarification on "certain issues."

"Dates for a second round (of talks) will be fixed once we hear from the other side. It may be soon after Christmas," Mr. Senanayake said.

LTTE-backed newspapers in the north have accused Mr. Fernando of being a corrupt civil servant, prompting wide speculation that the rebels did not want Mr. Fernando for the talks.

Mr. Fernando rejected the allegations and said "vested interests" were either trying to undermine the peace effort or force the government to change the composition of the peace delegation.

The state-run Daily News Saturday quoted Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte as saying that a "virtual ceasefire" currently prevailed in the northeast because there were no hostilities "for sometime."

The bus blast also dented hopes of religious leaders who had hoped for a season of peace in the New Year.

In a Christmas Day message, the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, Archbishop Nicholas Marcus Fernando called on Christians to pray for peace in the embattled region, saying hopes for peace were stronger now.

Three Liberian warlords sign a new peace accord in Accra, nearly five years after the conflict erupted. Pictured are Charles Taylor of the National Patriotic Front (left) Alhaji Kromah of the United Liberation Movement and Armed Forces of Liberia chief of staff Hezekiah Bowen (right) (AFP photo)

Ghali congratulates Ghana on Liberia pact

UNITED NATIONS (R) — U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Ghali Friday congratulated Ghana's president for thrashing out a Liberian peace agreement designed to end nearly five years of civil war.

The deal, was signed late Wednesday, in Accra, the capital of Ghana without any mediation from U.N. political envoys.

The chief U.N. representative, Anthony Nyaki of Tanzania, appointed on Nov. 22, is currently in New York, a U.N. spokesman said.

Dr. Ghali, in a letter to flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, Ghana's president, said the agreement "would not have been possible without your personal determination and persistence."

But aware of the many ceasefires that have fallen apart in the past, Dr. Ghali said that he hoped "all the Liberian parties will abide by their commitments and that this agreement will herald an era of peace, national reconciliation and prosperity in Liberia."

An estimated 150,000 people have died in civil war and anarchy in Liberia since rebels led by former civil servant Charles Taylor invaded from Ivory Coast late in 1989.

The latest agreement builds on a deal signed by Mr. Taylor and two other main militia leaders in the Ghanaian town of Akosombo in September but which had civilian politicians dismissed earlier as a recipe for military dictatorship.

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Chairman of the Board of Directors:
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MOHAMMAD AMAD

Editor-in-Chief:
GEORGE S. HAWATMEH

Editorial and advertising offices:
Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman, Jordan.
Telephones: 667171/6, 670141-4
Telex: 21497 ALRAI JO
Facsimile: 696183

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Time of Hope

THIS YEAR'S Christmas season is distinctly different from all past years since we now have peace with Israel, and several Arab states are following suit. This should enable the occasion to be marked with real hope not only by Arabs and Israelis but also by the rest of mankind who look to Jerusalem and Bethlehem as holy cities free of war and destruction and open for worship to all Muslims, Christians and Jews.

Yet the divisions over the future of Jerusalem continue to haunt us and cast a shadow over all peace efforts. Jerusalem remains also a divided city even though Israel insists that it is a united city under its own jurisdiction. Even a short stroll in the Holy City would confirm what we have always suspected, namely, that East is East and West is West as far as Jerusalem is considered and never, it seems, shall the two worlds meet. The two sides of Jerusalem are so apart in every sense of the word that no amount of wishful thinking will succeed in uniting them.

Still, the new peace climate in the region promises to bring new and additional joys to all believers and this is what makes the outlook for 1995 more meaningful and bright. We therefore look at the future with more confidence and optimism, despite all the difficulties that lie ahead. The sooner the peace process becomes comprehensive comprising the rest of the concerned parties the sooner it would be possible to enjoy the full meaning of the positive change at hand.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

THE CONTINUING war between Lebanon and Israel is the best manifestation that comprehensive peace in the region is still far out of reach for its inhabitants and renders all peace agreements with the Jewish state incomplete, said Mahmoud Rimawi. The writer said in **Al Ra'i** that it is true that Lebanon stands to lose much more than Israel in men and material, yet the Israelis continue to lose morally and in men and the war continues to stand out as a reminder that no stability or security can materialise as long as the Israelis continue to occupy Arab lands. The Lebanese resistance stands out alone in confrontation with Israel in defence of Lebanon's lands and in a bid to secure an end to occupation and to ensure freedom, continued the writer. The Lebanese resistance, he added, still holds the military option and continues to use it regardless of the peace talks that the Lebanese government might be involved in the course of the Middle East peace process, said the writer. The continued war, he stressed, reflects the act that the peace accords Israel is seeking with its Arab neighbours will remain fragile until occupation is terminated.

AL DUSTOUR daily Saturday welcomed the truce announced between the Serbs and the Bosnians, expressing hope that it would be perpetuated and would end the suffering of the innocent civilian population. The war in Bosnia made a mockery of human rights and international principles and exposed a whole nation to extermination, said the paper. It said the ceasefire in Bosnia could mark the beginning of a rational dialogue in former Yugoslavia with the purpose of attaining a final and lasting settlement to the conflict. The past years of bloodshedding and armed conflict should convince the two sides that through war no party can secure the upper hand and there can be no victors but victims and devastation, added the paper. If the war is allowed to continue, it would set an example for other regional conflicts based on ethnic, religious, sectarian or other considerations, which are detrimental to mankind.

Sunday's Economic Pulse

By Dr. Fahed Fanek

Jordan did not sign peace treaty for financial gains

THOSE WHO object to peace and the peace treaty with Israel should be the last to criticise the absence of economic benefits of peace. They had claimed that the treaty will further hurt Jordan in every respect. Now that none of their negative predictions materialised, we should remain on full alert to minimise any risk and prevent any damage they warn of.

Those who supported peace and approved of the treaty are now unfairly accused of having promised the people of Jordan that upon signing the treaty, milk and honey will become abundant, that the economy will prosper, the unemployment will disappear, and that poverty will be no more.

This is a false accusation. No one to my knowledge ever made such sweeping promises. The Jordanian media promoted peace but did not promise milk and honey. The thrust of their argument was that lack of peace is more harmful and risky to Jordan. Saying now that peace will not turn the economic situation upside down, and will not solve all our economic problems, does not represent a retreat or reversal. We are still at the very first steps in the road of peace. The treaty is only several weeks old. It is too early to start to upgrade or downgrade predictions and promises in either direction.

Of course, everybody has the right to expect milk and honey and end up in bitter disappointment or shock, but he or she has no right to blame his/her mistake on others and claim that he or she was deceived by the media or by official "misinformation."

It is true that peace gave rise to many expectations regarding the Jordanian economy, such as getting more water badly needed by the country, partial forgiveness of debt, softer conditions for debt rescheduling, higher activity in the tourism sector, more foreign grants, and an improvement in the investment climate following the removal of Israeli threats that we lived with for decades. All this was stated in the past, and can be safely reiterated now, because it remains true. Part of those benefits was already fulfilled, but others take more time. However, the alleged claims that millions of dollars will be lavishly showered over our heads is something else, which no one claimed and could not be found except in the heads of those who were disappointed.

Perhaps the peace benefits, especially in economic terms, will turn out to be higher or lower than expected, and this is normal. Due to many inter-related factors, no one can accurately predict the future.

The support for the peace treaty was not based on pure economic considerations; therefore, peace cannot be judged merely on economic terms such as the volume of foreign aid and soft loans that will flow immediately to the country. Peace was opted for as a political and national goal that will determine the future of Jordan, its national security, and its regional and international role as a major player in Middle Eastern affairs, taking into account well-known internal, Arab and international circumstances.

The positive impact of an early treaty with Israel on the position of Jordan in the region can be seen upon evaluating the alternative situation if Jordan were left behind, and outside the new political formula. One has to be blind not to see the positive present and future consequences of peace on the Jordanian economy. It may be true that the economic and financial benefits of peace may not be huge, or as good as we hoped for, but those who classify themselves as anti-treaty have a duty to prove the alleged political and economic damages, if any, inflicted on Jordan due to the treaty, if they are really motivated by the best interests of Jordan.

The Chechens and Russia: A hatred as old as the land

By Yo'av Karny

WASHINGTON — Exasperated about Russia's failure to crush Chechen resistance, a senior Russian bureaucrat addressed an urgent memorandum to his superiors.

This could have happened last week, as the Red Army attacked the tiny, obstinate north Caucasian nation. Or it could have happened in February 1944, or October 1920. In this case, though, it was 1834, and the addressee was Emperor Nicholas I.

"The Chechens," wrote the Russian civil servant, "spend their life plundering and raiding their neighbours, who hate them for their ferocity... Often punished by Russian arms, they are always ready to begin their crimes again... The only way to deal with this illintentioned people is to destroy it to the last... This would not be difficult, because their total numbers have greatly diminished."

Diminished they had, in no small measure thanks to the tireless efforts of four Russian emperors since the days of Catherine the Great. Though Nicholas never approved the blueprint for a "final solution" of the Chechen question, he proceeded to drown the Chechenya region in blood and carnage.

The Chechens were crushed, their land was deforested, their yurts, or villages, leveled and nearly two-thirds of their population was left dead. Many others were driven into exile in the Ottoman-controlled Middle East, where their descendants live to this day.

Those left behind grew accustomed to gross mistreatment by whoever happened to occupy the Russian throne, be it a Romanov czar, a Bolshevik secretary-general or a democratically elected president.

Few people on the Russian land mass — or anywhere else, for that matter — have been victimised more often. In the winter of 1944, when Hitler was busy shipping Jews in cattle cars to Auschwitz, Stalin applied the same method to the Chechens: He ordered the overnight deportation of the entire population to the steppes of Kazakhstan and Siberia. They were accused, along with other Muslim nations, of fictious collective collaboration with the Nazis.

The nominally autonomous Chechen region was dismantled, and the spoils were divided among Russians, Ossetians and Georgians, all of them Christian. Soviet geographers were ordered to erase from the map any reminder that this ancient nation ever existed.

The Chechens, and their ethnic brethren, the Ingush, were meant to die. One-third did. Those who did not owed much of their survival to their resilience, embodied in a mystical brand of Islam called Sufism.

Sufism, often derided by Russia as "Islamic fundamentalism," has been the Chechen ultimate weapon. It combines the militant, purist notion of an Islamic lifestyle, a message of defiance in the face of adversity and an extraordinary formula for internalising one's rage. Central to Muslim practice in Checheya is an ecstatic dance called *zikr*, taught nearly 150 years ago by Kunta Haji, an illiterate shepherd who experienced a mystical revelation "on the road to Baghdad."

Kunta Haji is credited with helping the Chechen close their ranks, even at times of overwhelming defeat. Men of all ages would gather in public, form circles, chant prayers, jump and shake their heads and arms. They would beseech God and his prophets to forgive their numerous sins and purify them. Emerging from a trance of an hour or more, they would find catharsis — sometimes weeping or even losing consciousness.

Imperial Russia, having just overcome the Chechen combat skills in battle, was terrified by the nonviolent, self-oriented zikr. In 1864, Kunta Haji was committed to a mental asylum. Zikr was outlawed; performing it became a capital offense. Kunta Haji's followers were massacred or banished to Siberia.

But the Chechens's saga of resistance was far from over. In 1877 they rose up in arms. In the early 20th century, they were briefly seduced by Lenin, whose emissaries sought to convert the socially egalitarian Chechens to communism, but eventually revolted against Bolshevism in 1920 and gave the Red Army a bloody nose. They rebelled again in 1929 and in 1940. Throughout, the Chechens managed to preserve not only their traditional clan system but their religious structure. Soviet and post-Soviet experts have greatly underestimated this phenomenon.

Stalin's 1944 deportation was reversed in 1957, but at no point did his successors see fit to offer an apology, let alone indemnities. The outside world knew little of the plight of this isolated nation.

Through the '70s, the Soviet government was to treat Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, as enemy territory, where nighttime curfews were imposed as a matter of routine.

Outright hatred of all matters Chechen are common to Russians, be they narrow-minded nationalists or ostensibly tolerant liberals. Many who threw in their lot with the independence-craving Baltic states are disdainful of equally independence-craving Chechens.

In three weeks of travelling across Chechenya, I came across few Chechens who opposed their nation's independence. Many who vociferously objected to the present leader, Dzhokar Dudayev, still insisted that independence was not a plank in somebody's party platform, but a tenet of faith.

Mr. Dudayev, a retired Soviet general, proved to be too narcissistic, too temperamental and at times unnecessarily provocative. He evoked too often the historical figure of Sheikh Mansour, the heroic leader of Chechenya's first rebellion against Russia two centuries ago. In doing so, and in dealing brutally with his political rivals, he made it much easier for Moscow to demonise him. Even worse, he played into the hands of proponents of racist stereotypes, already prevalent in Russian society.

Chechen prominence in Russian organised crime (talking of the "Chechen mafia" is how Russians give themselves a good chill on a hot day) allowed Moscow to portray Mr. Dudayev as a Caucasian Godfather.

Russian ministers talk of Chechenya's transformation into a "free crime zone." Yet Russia has not hesitated to employ the good offices of convicted assassins and well-known crime bosses in trying to undermine Mr. Dudayev. All along, Russia has failed to recognise the roots of the Chechen conflict: its own mistreatment of the Chechens.

Mr. Karny, an Israeli journalist, recently spent three months in the Caucasus and is writing a book about the region. This article is reprinted from The Washington Post.

Freedom — What price?

CHECHENYA has always been intractable, rebellious, and troublesome. It has consistently displaced unruliness, rose up in arms, and repeatedly instigated uprisings — this is the Russian view. However, Chechenya is a small nation, very small in fact, a mere 19,000, square kilometres. As such, its voice goes unheard, its tragic history largely ignored, and its true identity barely recognised. Very few have cared enough to search for, and discover the truth. And that truth is that Chechenya is not Russian territory, and its people are not even Slavs let alone Russian.

If Chechenya is an "internal problem" within "Russian boundaries" as Kozyrav claims, it is so only through the age-old motto of "might is right."

After all, it is an undisputed fact that Chechenya is an occupied Caucasian land. Its people are ethnic Caucasians who have inhabited that region for thousands of years. That the Russian occupation took place over 130 years is beside the point, it is still an occupation. Anyone who cares to investigate will find history books full of vivid accounts of Chechen resistance to occupation beginning with Tzarist Russia in the 19th century, and ending with the Communist take over in 1918. No not really. As recent events have demonstrated, not ending... not by a long shot!

When Russia started infringing upon the Caucasus, the Chechens, along with other Caucasian nationalities, engaged in war against Russia to retain their land and their independence. They did it through all possible means: in the woods, on horse back, in villages, in valleys. They fought the Russians every step of the way, inch by inch, with very little arms or fire power, and ever less manpower. With all its might and huge resources, it still took Russia over 80 years to subdue, and bring those people under their control. By then, the Chechens were reduced to 25 per cent their original numbers. The same atrocity was repeated by Communist Russia in 1945 in, if possible, more gruesome detail when the whole Chechen nation was uprooted and deported to Siberia. This time its population was cut down to 50 per cent.

It would do Russia good to switch to a different strategy, to make reparations for its past mistakes, to keep in mind that the Chechen spirit is indomitable, and that repeated attempts at crushing it will only result in further anguish and suffering, and not only for the Chechen people.

The Soviet Union has disintegrated. The Russian Federation, which is composed of many diverse ethnic groups unrelated to the Russians, in addition to the Russian people, is held as a unit by sheer force only. The Caucasus does not belong to the Russian nation, not physically, ethnically, and definitely not morally. It is about time for the Russian Federation to release its hostage nations, to unchain the proud Caucasus, to let the Chechens go!

N. Jubreal

LETTERS

Lost but not found

To the Editor:

I WOULD LIKE to convey to the readers of the Jordan Times a warning — based upon personal experience — concerning the risks of shipping valuable items via Royal Jordanian Airlines.

On Sept. 13, I placed several boxes of household items along with two boxes containing the components of a desktop computer in the lands of the Royal Jordanian cargo agent in Chicago, to be shipped to Sanaa, Yemen. I myself was scheduled on the flight for Sept. 18 and was told that they would try to get it on the same plane.

On Sept. 21 (in Sanaa) I received a call stating that my cargo had arrived. Upon arrival at the customs warehouse of Sanaa International Airport I started through the steps of claiming my belongings. Yet when the inspector opened the computer boxes, (to casual inspection appearing just as when I had dropped them them off in Chicago), inside — along with the original Styrofoam packing — was one concrete block in each. The computer had been stolen.

A Royal Jordanian representative in Sanaa viewed the boxes and declared, when I asked him, that I needn't keep anything as evidence. I filed a report along with copies of the cargo waybill and customs papers with the cargo office in Sanaa, who sent everything on to Amman. I received assurance from Mr. Ali Hlayel, RJ's Yemen area representative, that I was due a replacement computer.

Since then more than two months have passed. The insurance company handling the case for RJ has asked that I send them numerous items including the weights of the computer boxes, a copy of the computer purchase receipt (requested twice), pictures of the boxes as they'd arrived, and a sample of the tape from the boxes (instead, I had one of the concrete blocks sent to Amman). Every week I receive a new request for information, but as yet there's been no indication of a replacement forthcoming. In fact, I finally received a call on Nov. 22. with the news that a reimbursement of $572 was being of offered by RJ's insurance company (the computer cost was $2,500 — less than the cost of a round trip ticked to the U.S.). From the beginning I have stressed that nothing short of a replacement computer in my hands in Sanaa will be acceptable. If Royal Jordanian is truly concerned for its reputation, it would be an easy thing to simply replace the computer and then wait themselves for the insurance company to come through.

I have flown many times with Royal Jordanian and know many businessmen who like me — as a direct result of this incident — are concerned about the safety of goods shipped via RJ, and will refuse to travel via Royal Jordanian in the future if this matter is not satisfactorily concluded. It is my desire that others learn form my experience and think twice before consigning their shipments to Royal Jordanian.

James Hudson,
Swedish Training Centre,
Tazi, Yemen.

Editors note: The Jordan Times referred the above letter received on Dec. 6 to RJ management for comment on Dec. 21. We received the following response from RJ:

To the Editor:

Kindly note that RJ's Insurance Department has settled the complaint issue as per attach letter Ref: 7/2/1236 dated 16th. of Nov., 1994 (see below).

This settlement was based on international law and the Warsaw convention governing conditions of contract of carriage.

Item 6 of these conditions states: "In case of loss or damage of part of the consignment the weight to be taken into account in determining carrier's limit of liability shall be only the weight of the package concerned."

"Carrier's liability shall not exceed USD 20 or the equivalent per kilogramme of goods lost unless a higher value is declared by the shipper and supplementary charge is paid.

Based on the foregoing passages we regret being unable to reconsider any additional amounts on Mr. Hudson's claim.

We do regret the inconvenience caused to Mr. Husdon. Royal Jordanian wishes to pledge the offering of the best services to all clients.

Moh'd Hashim Murtada,
Director Cargo.

Kindly pay to the order of... MR.... JIM HUDSON... ..... P.O. Box 15320 ..... SANAA-YEMEN.....
.....
Sum of (USD 572.) equivalent to J.D. 393.825 being compensation competent to above for loss of CONTENTS OF TWO CTNS.

M. Abu Shmais

Unhealthy bickering

To the Editor:

In his article entitled "Let history repeat itself" (Jordan Times, Dec. 24, 1994), Dr. Musa Keilani stopped short of equating the last days of the Arabs in Spain with the prevailing disunity among the Arabs of today.

It should be emphasised that the current bickering about the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem, if not stopped forthwith, could escalate into areas, which are far removed from being a healthy exercise between Muslims.

And more so, it should be made clear that the party with more money, cannot, and should not be allowed to claim any licence of ascendancy simply because they happened to possess huge financial resources. Where were the lords with money, when they were money-less?

There is only one yard stick to measure one's concern with the sanctity of the holy sites. Certainly it is not that of Baal; but faith in the Jand, God and the tenets of morality and ethics.

Ludwig W. Tamari,
Amman.

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any subject they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication, however, should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld only upon request and under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing. The newspaper is not responsible for the return of unused manuscripts.

The gold of the Gods, the gold of the Andes

A lambayegue mask from Peru (top)

and a latolita mask from Ecuador (below).

By Pascale Teinac

"In the past, the world was made of gold and the sky still is". This poetical description, taken from an Andine legend, could be used as an emblem for the sumptuous exhibition "L'Or des Dieux, l'Or des Andes" which presented some fabulous objects of pre-Columbian goldware throughout the summer in Metz in the East of France.

This exhibition, which was presented by the General Council of the Moselle Department and sponsored by UNESCO, is a real first. Never before had such a great number of gold objects been gathered together in Europe; 614 rare items coming from Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, provide a unique panorama of pre-Hispanic Andine metallurgy, from 1,300 B.C. till the Spanish conquest.

Today, these precious objects (jewellery, masks, sacrificial knives and votive statuettes) found in the tombs of princes or high priests of vanished civilisations, make up the gold-guarantees of the monetary reserves of the Central Banks of those three countries, where they are preserved and exhibited.

For the pre-Columbian peoples, gold was not tainted by any monetary connotations but it was directly linked to the Sun and was the reflection of a fervent dialogue with the sacred. Gold, which they called "the sweat of the Sun" while silver was "the tears of the Moon", was not a symbol of wealth but of power, and its sheen, like the rays of the sun gave off energy which could be transmitted to humans, offering them light, heat, power and fecundity.

The Incas, who worshipped Inti, the Sun-God, religiously revered gold in a manner which had nothing to do with, the greed of the Conquistadors. The latter found nothing better to do than to melt down the treasures, decorating the royal palaces and the temples of the Sun built by the Aztecs in Mexico and the Incas in Peru, for their weight in gold.

After the bloody raids by Cortes in Mexico and Pizarro in the Peruvian Andes, the Conquistadors brought back some 200 tonnes of melted down gold to Spain between 1521 and 1660, which was a tremendous treasure compared with the meagre 75 tonnes produced every year by the nations of Europe.

The craze for gold which haunted the Conquistadors, as well as the wide-scale destruction of "idols" ordered by the Christian priests, and the vandalism of grave-robbers, meant that for centuries Europe knew nothing at all about the wealth of the civilisations which preceded those (the Mayas, the Aztecs and the Incas) destroyed by the Spanish.

Archeological excavations have fortunately made it possible to raise the veil on these remarkable pre-Columbian civilisations. Thus, there was the astonishing discovery, in 1987, in the north of Peru, of the tomb of the "Lord of Sipan", a high Mochica dignitary (from one of the richest Peruvian cultures) who lived in the 2nd or 3rd century A.D. The tomb has been faithfully recreated for the exhibition in Metz in the church of Saint-Pierre aux Nonnains which is the oldest church in France.

In the funeral chamber of the tomb, whose discovery reminds one of that of Tutankhamen's treasure in Egypt, the Lord of Sipan, a warrior-priest, had been buried in a wooden coffin with a bar of gold in his mouth, covered in all kinds of gold objects. These include masks, plates, necklaces, earrings with turquoise inlays, nose ornaments, an anthropomorphic sacrificial knife (the famous Peruvian "tumi"), a helmet and a crescent-shaped tiara. At the head, and food of the sarcophagus, eight other skeletons were found, including those of the lord's two wives or favourite concubines, a child, two warriors and a dog (whose vocation is to guide souls), as well as the remains of llamas which had been sacrificed. A terrifying detail is that the skeleton of a guardian with amputated feet was also found. It is the symbol of the eternal sentry who would never run away. More than 1,100 anthropomorphic ceramics (a big and beautiful speciality of the Mochica culture) were also found in this exceptional grave.

The gold rush was also prevalent in Columbia, the land of "El Dorado", the man "covered in gold" whose legend led thousands of gold-diggers to futilely rush to Lake Guatavita.

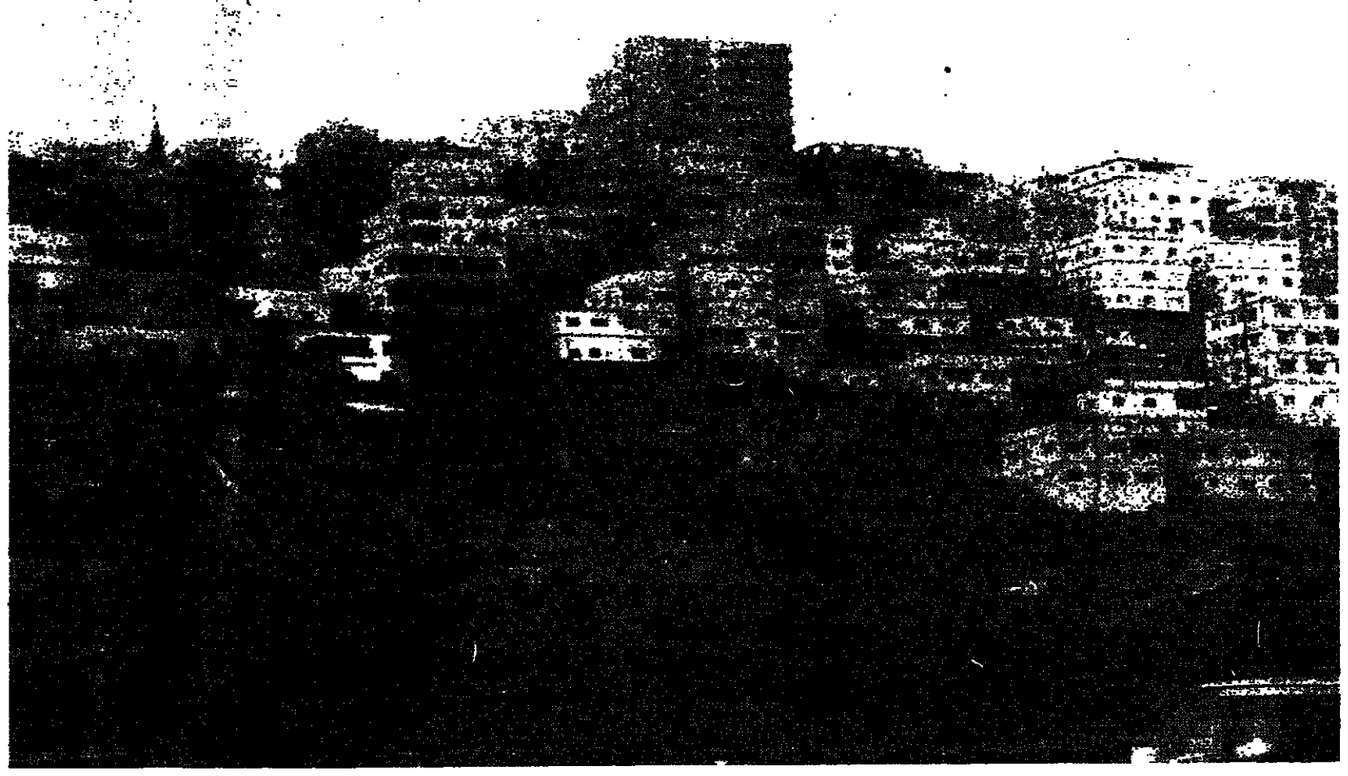
Colombia (151 objects), Ecuador (168) and Peru (295), their museums and, above all, their private and public banks proved to be very generous with their loans.

Moving from one display-case to another, wonders what to admire the most among these objects from about twenty different cultures: Lambayeque, Inca (Peru), Carchi and La Tolita (Ecuador) funeral masks, Mochica, Chimu (Peru), Tolima and Tairona (Colombia) breast-plates and pendants, Nasca (Peru) head-dress ornaments, Inca (Peru) and Muisca (Colombia) votive statuettes, Tolima (Colombia) hair-removal tweezers, Lambayeque goblet-vases ("keros") and so many other remarkable items.

At any rate, the big winners are the marvellous pre-Columbian goldsmiths who, the second century B.C., have revealed incomparable craftsmanship in all goldware techniques.

They invented cire perdue casting. They already worked platinum before our era whereas Europeans only started to do it in the 18th century and they skilfully practised the art of hammering, repoussé, chiselling, filigree, incrustations, gilding, polishing, burnishing and other techniques of working gold — the gold of the gods of course.

L'Actualite en France



Apartment buildings in Amman — how good is the finish?

What is this, a city, or a maze of stone blocks?

By Ian Atalla
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — For building contractor Elias Baddour, a drive through Sweifiyeh, one of Amman's more recently-built commercial districts, is like a textbook lesson in chaos. "You'd think Sweifiyeh is 60-years-old by the way it looks, not 10," he says.

Besides haphazard planning of streets and car parking allocations, the quality of building is so poor, Mr. Baddour maintains, that "even those who know nothing about the construction business complain about it."

Both Mr. Baddour and several engineers who spoke with the Jordan Times believe Sweifiyeh is one glaring example of a widespread problem among Amman's private sector construction projects. They maintain that significant numbers of landowners and real estate investors, mainly those planning to build medium to small-scale projects such as apartment complexes and office buildings, regard close adherence to Jordanian building codes and the full supervision of qualified engineers as unjustifiable expenses.

"They believe engineers are something imposed on them by law, rather than an essential service," says Laith Shubeilat, the president of the Jordanian Engineers Association (JEA). Such owners and investors would grudgingly accept to pay a registered engineer for the minimum level of draft plans necessary to obtain a licence for their project at the municipality, Mr. Shubeilat says. But after that, any additional engineering services, such as reliable working draft plans for the building or on-site supervision of actual construction are seen by many as "expenses which benefit the engineers' pockets only."

Efforts by owners to trim down what they see as unnecessary costs also include utilisation of engineers and building contractors who are not licenced by the JEA or the Jordan Contractors Association, says Mr. Baddour. He estimates that such was the case in "perhaps 20 to 25 per cent of the construction projects in Amman."

Amman has a substantial number of unlicenced, low-rate contracting firms which do "substandard work and cut corners on the finishings," according to Suhail Halabi, senior project manager for Consolidated Construction Company. As for those who might take the place of a licenced engineer in supervising a construction project, Mr. Baddour says, examples would be a newly graduated engineering student not yet approved by the JEA, or "a superintendent with 20 years of working experience in construction but no formal training."

Such aggressive and sometimes technically illegal cost-cutting, leading to faulty quality, is extremely rare to non-existent in public sector building projects and larger-scale private projects such as shopping malls and banking centres, where "you find very high standards due to strict supervision and execution," Mr. Halabi says.

Rather, he maintains, these cases are found among the smaller private sector projects, usually apartment buildings, where "you may be shocked by both the standard of the design and the finishings," particularly if the owner or investor "wishes to sell the apartments for a higher margin of profit and could care less about the standards."

A major example of such poorly finished construction, says Mr. Baddour, lies among the large number of apartments built immediately following the Gulf war, when many landowners and real estate investors moved to cash in on the huge numbers of Kuwait returnees looking for housing.

None of the experts who talked to the Jordan Times was aware of any in-depth study on the subject, but Mr. Halabi's personal, qualified estimate was that "roughly 50 per cent" of the apartments built during the post-Gulf war construction boom "are suffering from subgrade finishings."

A large number of these apartments were not only causing serious headaches for their creators and occupants alike but are costing "several hundred dinars monthly," according to Mr. Halabi, due to faulty electrical wiring, plumbing, leaky ceilings, poor insulation, etc. There are also hundreds of other poorly finished apartments which "still lie empty and unsold" due to lack of interest in them by potential buyers or renters, according to Mr. Baddour.

Despite some hard words for those dealing in medium and small-scale construction projects in Amman, Mr. Baddour, Mr. Halabi and Mr. Shubeilat all firmly agree that basic structural integrity and safety of buildings throughout Amman is not a risk factor. The Dec. 10 collapse of a five-story apartment building under construction in Nazzal suburb, much publicised in the local media, was "an extreme rarity," says Mr. Shubeilat, and such a case is highly unlikely to occur again at any time in the foreseeable future inside Amman.

The predominant use of stone and cement in local construction projects rather than flimsier materials such as lumber plays a sizeable role in limiting the possibility of structural failure, Mr. Halabi says. In addition, he notes, Jordan's legal codes regarding basic structural safety of buildings are rigorous. Construction in progress is subject to strict on-site checks for structural integrity by the Civil Defence Department (CDD), he says, and any engineer who supervises a building project is fully responsible for the building's safety for a period of 10 years after its completion.

Thus, concludes Mr. Halabi, "the problem is not safety — even the poorly designed apartments in Amman are still very safe."

"No, we are not in a disaster zone by any means," says Mr. Baddour. "And the problems are not in the form of a tragedy. The problem is consumers finding a real lack of quality in terms of finishings and utilities, and suffering materially for it."

One prominent engineer, however, is more sceptical about structural quality of buildings in Amman as well as Jordan as a whole, for several specific reasons.

The director of the Royal Scientific Society's Building Research Centre, Seyfeddin Muaz, says that some 80 steel buildings throughout Jordan had collapsed or suffered severe structural damage under the strain of unusually heavy snowfalls in the winter of 1991, among them a bus hanger, factories and warehouses. When the Building Research Centre investigated, he says, "we found the main reason for these events was that the owners hadn't followed the codes."

Although sections of the Kingdom's building codes set out specifications meant to provide for endurance under severe weather conditions and even earthquake tremours, "many people, as well as decision-makers, are not taking these codes as seriously as they should," Dr. Muaz maintains.

Finally, he pointed out, structural problems in buildings do not usually fully manifest themselves until five to seven years after construction had been completed. Thus, he maintains, the verdict is not yet completely in as to the structural quality of buildings in Amman which have been constructed after the Gulf war.

As for small-scale construction in the private sector, standards of quality are likely to be on the rise, says Mr. Baddour, "as the lack of availability of good apartments has created heightened awareness about the issue throughout the market."

"The JCA and JEA are cracking down on violators, I must admit," he says. "In 1994, they succeeded a lot in improving the situation."

Towering, prehistoric still alive down under

SYDNEY (Agencies) — scientists have discovered a real-life Jurassic Park. There are no dinosaurs in this lost world — just 39 prehistoric pine trees that were thought to have been extinct.

The trees, related to a species that existed 150 million years ago, have been found west of Sydney, but the New South Wales government said Wednesday that it would keep their exact location secret to ensure their safety.

The previously unknown trees, some measuring 40 metres tall and three metres in diameter, are in a deep gorge in the Wollemi National Park, about 200 kilometres west of Sydney in the Blue Mountains. They have been named the Wollemi Pines.

"The discovery is the equivalent of finding a small dinosaur still alive on Earth," said Carrick Chambers, director of the Royal Botanic Gardens. He said Wednesday that the only other discovery of its kind was in 1944, when another prehistoric tree species was found in China.

"It really is a living fossil," said Barbara Briggs, the institution's scientific director.

A National Parks and Wildlife Service officer, David Noble, came across the trees while exploring a 600-metre gorge in the park in August.

"Initially, I didn't think it was anything new," he said.

The trees, covered in dense, waxy foliage with distinctive bubbly bark that makes them look as if they are coated with brown chocolate, occupy a tiny 5,000-square-metre grove of prehistoric rain forest in the 500,000 hectare park.

So far, 23 mature trees and 16 younger ones have been found, making them also among the world's rarest plants. The oldest tree is believed to be from 200 to 300 years old.

While the trees can be identified as pines, or conifers, their closet relatives are extinct plants only found in fossils from the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods about 65 million to 200 million years ago, said Ken Hill, a botanist with Sydney Gardens.

"This is probably one of the most significant botanical finds of this century," Mr. Hill said. "It's a very exciting find."

The discovery of the trees had been kept a secret with only a few scientists notified, but a Sydney newspaper broke the story, prompting the New South Wales government to confirm their existence.

"Their location is going to be kept secret and we will be ensuring that, both in a security sense and from a fire protection point of view, because we don't want this unique area trampled upon or damaged in any way," said the New South Wales environment minister, Chris Hartcher.

"The fact that such a large plant can go undiscovered for so long is a clear indication that there is more work to be done before we can say we understand our environment" he added.

Ms. Briggs compared the discovery of the pines to those of the coelacanth fish in 1938 off Madagascar and the dawn redwood tree in 1944 in China.

Once, the Wollemi Pines would have covered vast areas of the world, but as the climate changed the few remaining trees survived only in this damp, protected gorge.

"This is a plant family that was widespread, including the northern hemisphere," she said before the "great extinction" when "we lost the dinosaurs."

"It's been in a very sheltered spot and I think it's escaped fire for a very long time," she said.

"It's extremely inaccessible," Mr. Hartcher said. "It's a good day's walk for anybody who wants to walk to the area. There are no paths there."

Babies are born pure

By Julie Myerson

It is Sunday and we've driven to a seaside town to see a friend's baby christened.

By inclination I am more agnostic than atheist, but still regret that I cannot or do not believe in God. Regret because, as always, the sight of family and friends gathered in a hush of finery around a font moves me — sends a sweet, romantic shiver down my spine.

We "christened" (there's no other, better word) our own three babies in the garden, elected "god-parents" and celebrated their births as something special and good, to be shared with the people we love. That was our own secular version, though I've also taken my vows as a godmother in church and I did not have a problem with it.

Well, not until now.

But here we are on this sunny, wintry morning and from our chilly pew at the front, I watch the baby's bobbing head. It is the softest, most vulnerable thing, the pulse visibly beating where the bones of the skull have not, at five months, quite fused together.

She's apparently just cut a first, early tooth and a glistening line of dribble runs from gum to white lace robe. I'm doing my usual thing of aching unrealistically to have my children that size and weight and softness again, when I hear the vicar's monotone invoking the godparents to renounce on the baby's behalf "the Devil and all his works" and pray "that all carnal affections may die in him" (him" being the baby).

It never used to bother me — this Christian premise that "all men are conceited and born in sin." This Public Baptism of Infants — in which, let's face it, most of our friends participate — is principally about "sanctifying" the child and "washing away" his "sin," so that he can be received into Christ's holy church, "that thing which by nature," according to the Book of Common Prayer, "he cannot have."

Well, I'm sorry, but I know that my babies were born both holy and clean. The question of how clean they remain will doubtless depend upon all sorts of things — not least, the way we bring them up — but, nevertheless, I have never seen anything quite as squeaky clean as a brand new baby.

And we are each entitled to our own perceptions of evil and its manifestations, but I find it repulsive to speak about the "Devil and his works" or "carnal affections" or even "sin" with reference to a seven-pound child.

The service ends with the baby screaming heartily and I'm with her. I stop my three-year-old using the kneeler as a launch pad and we go and eat the stickiest, pinkest cake you've ever seen.

Later the same week, my partner — who sits as a Youth Courts magistrate — comes home from a conference where Sir Ivan Lawrence, chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee, was the opening speaker.

Expounding on the benefits of the new prisons for the very young — we're talking about 14-year-olds here — Lawrence apparently proclaimed like a medieval witch-ducker that some people are actually born evil.

This is a man influential in framing the new Criminal Justice Act, which will make it legal to lock these children away in Secure Training Units — a euphemism for prisons for kids — last seen in this country more than 100 years ago.

"But," I say to partner, my mind still uneasily full of Sunday's church christening, "that means he thinks a proportion of babies are evil?"

"Quite." He stirs the risotto with a fed-up, what-can-do-about-these-people laugh.

It seems to me that Sir Ivan is wrong — not to mention misguided. But what I'm beginning overwhelmingly to feel is that the language of wrong-doing and punishment is a minefield, where such words as "evil" and "devil" are apt to explode in your face. And that — well-intentioned as it may be — religious-speak only adds to those mines.

When our five-year-old brought a re-telling of Noah's Ark home from school, we found ourselves highly uncomfortable with a story which maintained that Man was so sinful that he deserved to be all but wiped out by God. Whether or not you believe, how do you justify to a five-year-old a world where people are so sinful they deserve to die? It's our old friend "the Devil and his works" again.

Interestingly, my partner goes on to tell me that the Scottish system for handling young offenders is entirely different from the English one. Whether the child needs to be taken into care or has committed a crime, he is dealt with in exactly the same way in just the same court — a court whose only interest is the "needs of the child, not the deeds."

Moreover, the Scots have no intention of sending 13-year-olds to Secure Training Units, maintaining that they merely confirm in these kids the perceptions they have of themselves.

And, speaking of perceptions, I don't believe any word the well-meaning, liberal people crowding around that font on Sunday believed that baby needed to be "released" from sin or to renounce the "Devil," any more than I did. If you want your child accepted into the church, fine — but isn't it time all that foul, fearful language and the crude metaphor was itself renounced?

Back *chez* Myerson, the story of Noah and the faces, that we could not condone, led to a feisty bedtime debate about the treatment of baddies and whether putting them in prison was a bad thing.

"We try hard not to send them there," the socially hopeful-magistrate-father told his son. "We try to think of something else."

"What sort of thing?" the five-year-old wanted to know. "Setting the dogs on them?"

Ah Well.

The Independent

U.S. economy to slow but to avoid recession — OECD

WASHINGTON (R) — The United States looks set to experience slower economic growth next year and in 1996 but the world's biggest economy should avoid recession, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has said.

In its semi-annual World Economic Outlook, the Paris-based OECD also forecast higher U.S. inflation over the next two years and projected that the Federal Reserve (Fed) central bank would have to raise interest rates even further to contain it.

The U.S. central bank has raised rates repeatedly since February to curb inflationary pressures in the booming U.S. economy and to extend the economic expansion.

The OECD, which acts as a think-tank for rich industrial nations, generally believes the Fed will succeed in that task. But it foresees a more rocky landing for the economy in the run-up to the 1996 presidential election than the Clinton administration currently does.

For 1995, the organisation expects the U.S. economy to expand by 3.1 per cent. This is slower than the 3.9 per cent growth expected for this yeare but faster than the 2.9 per cent rate the OECD had forecast just a month ago for 1995.

Growth is likely to slow further in 1996 to two per cent as higher interest rates hit consumer and business spending, the OECD said. Unemployment could rise slihgtly as well.

However, buoyant exports will help cushion the economy and prevent a recession.

"A sharp turnaround in... exports could help the current external deficit to stop growing by 1996 for the first time since 1991," the organisation said.

"External demand is being stimulated by a weak dollar and stronger markets in major trading partners," it added.

The OECD expects short-term interest rates to rise from recent levels of around 5.5 per cent to 6.7 per cent in the second half of next year before levelling off.

But the higher rates will not be enough to prevent a rise in inflation, as measured by the gross domestic product deflator, to 2.5 per cent next year and 3.2 per cent in 1996, from two per cent in 1994, the OECD said.

It expects inflation to quicken because the economy has little, if any, spare capacity left with which to accommodate above-trend economic growth.

However, OECD chief economist Kumiharu Shigehara told a news conference in Paris that timely measures taken to ward off inflation should mean that interest rates would not need to rise by as much as they did in previous economic cycles.

He added that if the dollar pursued recent gains, there would be a welcome dampening effect on demand, which would help keep inflation down.

Asked about President Bill Clinton's plans for middle-class tax cuts, Mr. Shigehara said: "Broadly speaking, as economists, we would argue that it is better for the United States to go towards greater reliance on indirect taxes."

Yugoslav parliament approves 1995 budget

BELGRADE (R) — The Yugoslav parliament adopted Friday a 2,128 billion dinar ($1.5 billion) budget of which a lion's share was allocated for the army.

The budget, counting on zero inflation and price stability in 1995, was highly restrictive, experts said.

The budget allocation for the Yugoslav army was 1.611 billion ($1 billion), 76.2 per cent of the budget or 7.5 per cent of the gross domestic product.

The budget allocation for the army is about the same level as this year, analysts said.

Most of the funds are earmarked for wages and improvement of the army officers' standard of living, which has dropped to almost subsistence level in the past two years, authoritative sources told Reuters.

Budget allocations for the army in former Yugoslavia were usually as high as 90 per cent.

With the collapse of the former Yugoslav federation in 1991, the ensuing disintegration of the single Yugoslav market and U.N. sanctions with their economic downfall, the army was forced to share in the deprivation suffered throughout rump Yugoslavia comprising Serbia and Montenegro.

The federal budget will account for only 9.85 per cent of the gross domestic product, about the same as this year.

The federal government said it was a deficit-free budget since the National Bank of Yugoslavia (NBY) stopped financing the federal treasury in July.

The new budget will be financed from taxes (55.4 per cent), duty and import tariffs (26.9 per cent), exit taxes for Yugoslav citizens paying for travelling abroad (9.3 per cent), federal administration taxes (2.6 per cent) and various other federal administration income (4.5 per cent).

Philippine mining industry looks to better 1995

MANILA (R) — The Philippine mining industry, which has seen its workforce more than halved in the past three years, should snap out of the doldrums in 1995, government and industry officials have said.

Joel Muyco, director of the government's Bureau of Mines and Geosciences, said surging world metal prices coupled with the expected approval of a new mining law will encourage the entry of foreign companies to the industry.

"The sector is poised for a big leap. We're coming out of the doldrums. I consider 1995 as the start of the strong influx of foreign exploration companies into the country," he said.

"We're bullish about a strong recovery next year," added Deogracias Contreras, executive vice-president of the Philippine Chamber of Mines.

Inefficient management and a recession have savaged the industry, which in the 1970s used to contribute up to 25 per cent of the Philippines' foreign-exchange earnings.

Some 15,000 out of the 28,000 workers in the country's top mining companies have lost their jobs since 1991.

Atlas Consolidated Mining and Development Corp, which used to be the top copper mine in the region, laid off 4,000 workers and closed its mines in August 1993. There is now a plan to reopen them.

Industry officials laid the blame on rules that limited foreign firms to a 40 per cent equity in mining ventures, steep production costs and soft metal prices.

The new mining law, approved by the lower house and expected to pass the senate early in the new year, will allow foreign mining firms up to 100 per cent equity.

It will also allow them to recover their investments before sharing profits. Another measure approved in June will reduce excise taxes to a maximum of two per cent from five per cent, Mr Muyco said.

The new rules have drawn the attention of top foreign mining companies. Newmont Gold of the United States has applied for an agreement to explore a large area on northern Luzon island and Australia's Western Mining is exploring for gold in five areas on southern Mindanao island.

"When those two companies come in, there will be a chain reaction among companies in the industry," Mr. Muyco said.

Trisha Gutierrez, an analyst at Abacus Securities, said the entry of foreign miners will spur more competition as local companies seek joint venture agreements.

"The outlook is very optimistic," she said.

The Mines Bureau said gold output in 1993 was 21,155 kilogrammes against 25,609 kilogrammes in 1992. Silver output was 28,043 kilogrammes in 1993 against 32,755 kilogrammes in 1992.

Production of copper concentrates rose to 537,299 tonnes in 1993 from 491,747 in 1992, but in the first nine months of 1994, it had fallen to 301,185 from 402,600 in the same period in 1993.

Full-year projections for 1994 and 1995 were not available.

Industry officials said mining companies should consider expanding smelter capability to take advantage of strong demand from China, which needs enormous amounts of copper for its communications and transportation needs.

At the moment, all Philippine copper concentrates are shipped to Japan for smelting.

Exploration could lead to the opening of new mines that would come on stream by 2000, Mr. Muyco said.

"Ten years down the road, we can become again the leading producer of copper and gold in Asia. We can increase our share of export earnings to 25 per cent from the current six per cent by the end of the 10-year period," he said.

The Philippines, once one of the world's top 10 gold producers and now around 15th, has also barely touched its other mineral resources. It has major deposits of nickel, cobalt and chromite that have not been developed.

Mexicans fight economic panic as devaluation sends prices soaring

MEXICO CITY (AFP) — Mexico's falling peso has sent the prices of some goods soaring as much as 60 per cent, leading Mexican President Ernesto Zedilloi to appeal for help in avoiding "panic and psychosis."

The sudden crisis on the financial markets is rocking Mexico, which became the darling of emerging markets funds after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the United States and Canada took effect Jan. 1.

Yet an uprising in the southeastern state of Chiapas on that same day, political assassinations and a nagging feeling that the Mexican peso was overvalued have weighed on investors.

Specialists have estimated capital flight for December alone at about $6 billion.

Troubles burst into public view Tuesday, when the government announced it was widening the peso's trading band — essentially allowing a 15 per cent devaluation.

Early Thursday, the government announced an emergency plan to allow the peso to float freely against the U.S. dollar for 60 days and the currency dropped another 30 per cent. The peso has lost nearly 60 per cent of its value this week.

Previously, Mexico's currency was on a so-called crawling peg, which means it was devalued by a small, carefully controlled amount each day.

Finance Minister Jaime Serra Puche defended the step as a way to save the few reserves left to Mexico.

Efforts to prop up the currency have depleted the country's reserves, which dropped from $24.6 billion a year ago, to $14 billion last month and to just $6.5 billion currently.

An agreement Thursday between the government, business leaders and some unions that prices and salaries would be frozen for 60 days seems to have gone by the wayside almost immediately.

A spot check of stores found that prices of home appliances, clothing, furniture and food shot up between 15 and 30 per cent as sellers sought windfall profits. Vendors even hiked the prices of pirated pornographic videos by 30 per cent.

There are other signs of economic trouble, in particular a current account deficit of $25 billion and a $24 billion trade gap. The trade deficit has soared since NAFTA took effect on Jan. 1.

The peso's plunge has made new President Ernesto Zedillo's government budget obsolete for the next year. There had been predictions that inflation and growth would both be four per cent next year — something now considered impossible.

The devaluation could, paradoxically, bring the trade deficit down by making the prices of Mexican products more attractive to buyers. But it could also push up the cost of production and has already pushed up interest rates and the price of gold.

The stock market leapt at news of the free float, gaining 102.59 points (4.66 per cent) to 2,306.26 on Thursday. It rose another 1.07 per cent early Friday, increasing 24.64 points to 2,330.90 points.

Wednesday it shed nearly 11 per cent before partially rebounding.

Analysts said Friday that the dizzying drop of Mexico's peso has sent chills down the spines of investors with money in the Latin American powerhouse but Mexico City is moving to restore confidence.

Finance Minister Puche attended a meeting at the Federal Reserve branch in New York attended by some 70 officials from banks and mutual funds invested in Mexico in hopes of calming jittery nerves.

But the news that the peso would be floated was received badly.

"People were really very angry," said Michael Pettis of the investment bank Weston Groups. Mexico's handling of the decision to first allow the peso to drop 15 per cent on Tuesday and then allow it to float freely called the Mexican government's credibility into question, said Mr. Pettis.

Mexican authorities had said repeatedly that they would defend the peso, even though most analysts considered it overvalued.

As a sign of deteriorating confidence in Mexico, the financial rating firm Standard and Poor's announced Friday it was lowering its rating for the peso and putting its long-term foreign debt on a credit watch.

Standard and Poor's (S and P) said that it lowered the rating because of Mexico's difficulty in financing its current account deficit given the peso's plunge and the difficulties now facing President Zedillo in hitting targets of four per cent inflation and economic growth.

The peso had been trading at 3.46 to the dollar on Monday but dropped to 5.10 to the dollar on Friday.

But S and P's Pablo Scheffel said that despite the downgrade that Mexico's economy was basically healthy. "Clearly it's not a desperate situation," he said. "I am cautiously optimistic."

Moves to tighten credit and cut the Mexican government budget — which the International Monetary Fund said Thursday it was pleased with — could restore investor confidence, said Mr. Scheffel.

Lawrence Summers, the under secretary of the treasury for international affairs, urged investors to concentrate on Mexico's sound economic fundamentals, particularly the balanced government budget and independent central bank.

He also pointed to the willingness of some governments, corporate and union groups to agree to a 60-day salary and price freeze despite the price hikes inevitably associated with a devaluation.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 1994

By Thomas S. Pierson, Astrologer, Carroll Righter Foundation

GENERAL TENDENCIES: The Moon sextile Pluto and Jupiter will help to make this a Special Christmas for you and yours and help you with your communications as you improve conditions in home surroundings.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Try to understand worldly affairs better in the morning. Plan the future more intelligently. Have a fine family dinner tonight.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Early study right principles, and later contact those persons who can assist you to become more successful and better known.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Take care you do not irk your mate in any way in day hours. Then the evening can be spend happily together with a romantic dinner.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Concentrate on how to have better relations with a stubborn partner, and then put your ideas in operation.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Plan how to be more successful at your tasks during the week. Be with charming persons. Take any needed health treatments to feel your best.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Plan entertainments for the days ahead but less expensive ones than usual. Get in touch with friends for a very good time.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Be more concerned with monetary affairs in the morning. But get out later and visit fascinating friends. Read your newspaper to keep informed.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Get into spiritual studies which can be helpful to your advancement. Invite interesting persons into your home in the evening.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) It is important that you are practical during the daytime. Contact some bigwig who can assist you in the new week.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Concentrate on your personal desires in the daytime and later plan how to become more prosperous in the days ahead.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) Sit in the quiet of your study and analyse your hopes and ambitions and make right plans for the future so you have be very successful.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You have personal desires which need further analysis in the morning so you are sure they are truly what you want for future activities.

Birthstone of December: Turquoise - Zircon

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR MONDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1994

By Thomas S. Pierson, Astrologer, Carroll Righter Foundation

GENERAL TENDENCIES: Handle a civic affair wisely without taking risks and if you want to make the acquaintance of those you admire most you are going to need to be the one that takes the initiative and speaks first.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Important you get responsibilities handled even though you want to be with good friends. Spend time with friends later in the day or tonight.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Avoid a jealous partner. Look into new methods which can bring you greater advancement. Make the evening happier for your loved ones.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Do only the tasks which are necessary. Concentrate on whatever can bring you more success and income. Business before pleasure now.

MOON CHILDREN: (June 22 to July 21) Some special thought for your mate can bring fine results. Be more modern in dealing with business contacts and associates.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Contact the most progressive persons of your acquaintance and listen to ideas for your big advancement. Show your great ability.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You can get into new recreational activities which you have not enjoyed before this. Drive carefully today and tonight on the highway.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Be more pliable with your mate and be happier tonight. Show that you have your feet squarely on the ground with those in charge.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) The activities at home are very interesting at this time so go along with them. Be very charming with the bigwigs in authority.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Handle correspondence well and add a bit to humor to them. Be very happy at a social event in the evening with your loved one.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Study your property and know what can be added to it to make it more charming and valuable for you in the long run.

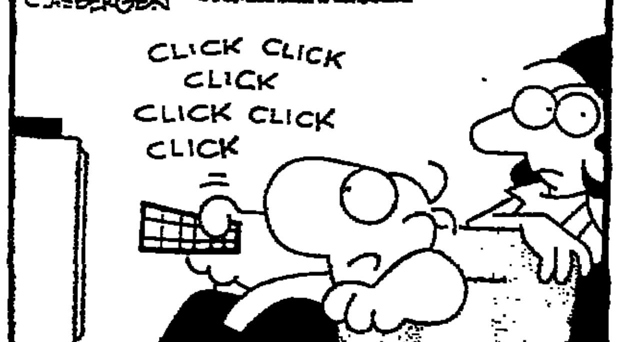
AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You have some clever ideas now that should be put in operation, even if others do not agree with them or have some uncertainty.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) You have secret aims which should be pushed now for good results. Be very active all day. Be thoughtful and kind to those under your roof.

Birthstone of December: Turquoise - Zircon

Peanuts

THE BETTER HALF. By Glasbergen



"How could you possibly be bored with our relationship? We've got 50 different channels to talk about!"

Andy Capp

JUMBLE THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME by Henri Arnold and Mike Argirion

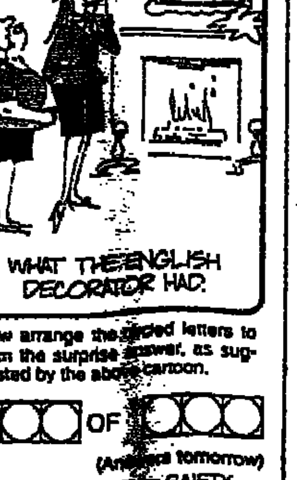
Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

TAGIN

ARVEG

RAHDLE

PATUCE



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

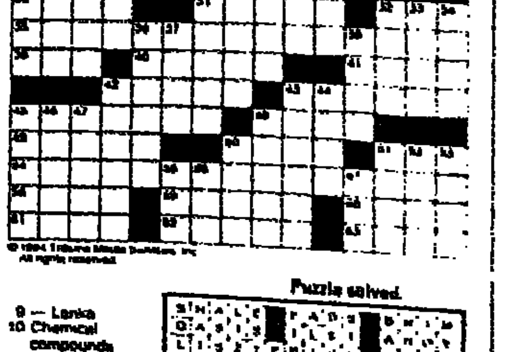
Answer: A [ ] OF [ ]

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: CHESS LOUSE PEPTIC GAIETY
Answer: Pursuing the church thief resulted in this — A STEEPLE CHASE

Mutt'n'Jeff

THE Daily Crossword by Betty Jorgensen



ACROSS
1 Hit hard
5 Basketball team
10 Dash
14 Wild blue yonder letters
15 Keep — to the ground
16 Pudding starch
17 Season's greetings
20 Course norm
21 Tusked pig
22 Host
23 Papal name
24 Took the lead
26 Bug
29 Shirt fasteners
30 QED word
31 Pool member
32 Charlemagne's domain abbr
35 More season's greetings
39 — Gatos, CA
40 Posts
41 Descended
42 Balm
43 Bounce on one's knee
45 Resolves
48 Vaccine name
49 Poetry Muse
50 Flying prefix
51 Tiny bit
54 Seasonal song words
58 Smell
59 Angry
60 A Fountain
61 Elvers
62 Alpine region
63 Flanders river

DOWN
1 Cookie
2 Tibetan monk
3 Consumer
4 Needlefish
5 Sluggish bodies of water
6 Last of the Mohicans
7 Oven used to anneal glass
8 Roman household god
9 — Lanka
10 Chemical compounds
11 Truman's birthplace
12 Century plant
13 Snoopied
18 Baseball stats
19 Follow closely
23 Pedestrian way
24 British guns
25 Melody
26 Mend
27 Florence's river
28 Sumo energy units
29 Flier
31 Petty thieves, in England
32 Returned
33 Marsh bird
34 Art deco name
36 Fireworks punk
37 Ashen
38 American
42 Indian lutes
43 Perennial grass
44 Like a bump on —
45 Friday creator
46 Wear gradually
47 Novel
49 A[illegible]
50 Weights
51 Charlotte [illegible]
52 [illegible] money
53 [illegible] contents
55 [illegible]
56 [illegible]

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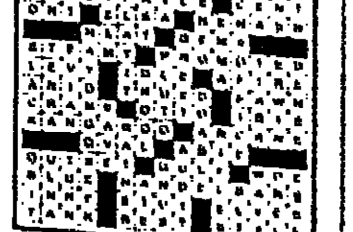
Puzzle solved.



business daily beat

A review of economic news from the Arabic press

Med-Dead canal seen better than Red-Dead

☆☆A study by the Japanese company Shimizu sees a Mediterranean-Dead Sea canal more feasible than a Red Sea-Dead Sea canal in terms of costs, volume of drinkable water and other benefits. The Red Sea-Dead Sea choice will cost $4,887 million to be paid in one stage whereas the Med-Dead option will cost $3,318 million and will be implemented in three stages. The study estimated the Red-Dead scheme to produce 595 million cubic metres of drinkable water compared to 800 million cubic metres that can be generated from the Med-Dead project which will also provide dams, water desalination plants and an artificial lake at Bisan. The other plan will not include such additional advantages (Al Aswaq).

☆☆A study by the Amman Chamber of Industry shows that the recent reductions in customs tariffs have negatively affected 42 local industrial products. The most affected were the marble, air-conditioning systems, chandeliers and satellite dishes as the tariffs on the imports of the same items went down from 100 per cent to 50 per cent. Reductions of tariffs from 85 per cent to 50 per cent on imports of televisions, water heaters and microwave ovens also had a negative effect on the local manufacturers of these products. Other local industries which were hit, but to a lesser extent, were producers of gum, chocolate and biscuits and manufacturers of car brakes. According to the study, the amendments of tariffs had marginal positive effects on eleven products but did not help to revive the transportation sector (Sawt Al Shaab).

☆☆More than 30 international companies have applied to the Council of Ministers to invest about JD150 million at the Amman Financial Market but these requests are still pending since last May (Al Aswaq).

☆☆The U.S. Congress is studying giving Jordanian exporters the equal treatment given to Israeli exporters. The United States Agency for International Development is also in the process of allocating $12 million to support Jordan's tourism sector in addition to sending a team to study and organise comprehensive joint projects (Al Ra'i).

☆☆Jordanian and Israeli tour and travel agents held discussions recently on marketing joint tourism packages to attract tourists from the U.S., Europe and the Far East to touristic sites in Jordan, Israel and the region. According to Nichola Sabanekh, president of the Jordanian Society for Tour and Travel Agents, there are more than 16 airlines which make occasional trips to Tel Aviv and Eilat airports and it is possible that Jordan can attract some travellers on these flights to visit the Kingdom either through the southern Wadi Araba crossing or the Jordan Valley crossing in the north (Al Aswaq).

☆☆A limited shareholding clothing company is under study to be transferred to a public shareholding company. Banks and political personalities intend to be strong participants in the new set up in partnership with a large U.S. firm (Al Aswaq).

☆☆Jordanian banks in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have attracted JD 220 million and 100 million shekels in deposits this year. The same banks extended JD 42 million in credit facilities (Al Aswaq).

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET

HOUSING BANK CENTER AMMAN - SHMEISANI
TELEPHONE: 660170 / 663170
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR SATURDAY 24/12/1994

COMPANY'S NAME	NO. OF SHARES TRADED	VALUE TRADED JD	PREV. CLOSING PRICE	CLOSING PRICE
ARAB BANK	660	120930	183.500	183.000
JORDAN NATIONAL BANK	15400	69149	4.500	4.480
BANK OF JORDAN	300	1146	3.820	3.820
MIDDLE EAST INVESTMENT BANK.	450	720	1.620	1.600
THE HOUSING BANK	1510	8379	5.510	5.550
JORDAN KUWAIT BANK	506	1516	3.000	3.000
JORDAN GULF BANK	6350	10427	1.680	1.640
JORDAN ISLAMIC BANK	2815	10406	3.700	3.700
BUSINESS BANK	2550	9143	3.670	3.550
JORDAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE BANK	1750	8518	4.870	4.870
BEIT ELMAL SAVING&INVESTMENT FOR HOUSING	250	775	3.120	3.100
AMMAN BANK FOR INVESTMENT	6025	9162	1.520	1.520
PHILADELPHIA INVESTMENT BANK.	200	344	1.730	1.720
B A N K S S E C T O R	38766	250613	INDEX NUMBER: 158.71 CHANGE	: -0.31%
JERUSALEM INSURANCE	100	421	4.210	4.210
AL-NISR AL-ARABI INSURANCE	600	2703	4.400	4.550
I N S U R A N C E S E C T O R	700	3124	INDEX NUMBER: 137.51 CHANGE	: +0.31%
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER	13658	21064	1.550	1.540
JORDANIAN ELECTRIC POWER /NEW	5750	8655	1.520	1.500
JORDAN HOTEL & TOURISM	500	3138	6.050	6.300
JORDAN HIMEH MINERAL	2650	5009	1.800	1.890
ARAB INTERNATIONAL HOTELS	350	1715	5.000	4.900
JORDAN NATIONAL SHIPPING LINES	3750	11789	3.140	3.140
NATIONAL PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	500	1205	2.420	2.410
JORDAN GULF REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT	5450	6785	1.250	1.240
MACHINARY EQUIP. RENTING & MAINTENANCE	5750	4429	.800	.770
JORDAN PRESS FOUNDATION / ALRA'I	250	2900	11.400	11.650
UNITED MIDDLE EAST & COMMODORE HOTELS	109650	272775	2.470	2.450
ARAB INTER. FOR INVESTMENT & EDUCATION	200	676	3.350	3.380
JORDANIAN EXPATRIATES INVESTMENT HOLDING	300	426	1.390	1.420
S E R V I C E S S E C T O R	148758	340565	INDEX NUMBER: 130.11 CHANGE	: -0.23%
ATTANQEEP CONST. MATERIAL MANUFACTURING	1200	1541	1.270	1.290
THE JORDAN CEMENT FACTORIES	2083	6047	2.920	2.900
JORDAN PHOSPHATE MINES	3820	10693	2.800	2.820
THE ARAB POTASH/NEW	750	4233	5.410	5.650
JORDAN PETROLEUM REFINARY	388	3616	9.330	9.320
THE JORDAN WORSTED MILLS	3050	24063	7.900	7.870
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL MANUFACTURING	11523	62923	5.550	5.380
THE JORDAN PIPES MANUFACTURING	350	970	2.820	2.770
JORDAN PAPER & CARDBOARD FACTORIES	1000	4200	4.200	4.200
DAR AL DAWA DEVELOPMENT & INVESTMENT	950	15947	16.950	16.750
ARAB INVESTMENT & INERNATIONAL TRADE	1000	1010	1.020	1.010
ARAB ALUMINIUM INDUSTRY	450	3115	6.950	6.900
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	13120	12415	.940	.940
ARAB PAPER CONVERTING & TRADING	4750	6583	1.390	1.390
INTERMEDIATE PETRO-CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES.	550	1580	2.900	2.870
JORDAN ROCKWOOL INDUSTRIES	2050	3208	1.570	1.560
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES	600	2580	4.400	4.300
JORDAN INDUSTRIES & MATCH/JIMCO	11850	10139	.850	.840
JORDAN SULPHO-CHEMICALS	11900	23803	2.020	2.000
ARAB CENTER FOR PHARM. & CHEMICALS	745	2077	2.770	2.800
UNIVERSAL MODERN INDUSTRIES	1400	5914	4.200	4.200
JORDAN INDUSTRIAL RESOURCES CO.	1650	4438	2.720	2.670
I N D U S T R I A L S E C T O R	75204	211242	INDEX NUMBER: 128.03 CHANGE	: -0.45%
G R A N D T O T A L	263428	805544	INDEX NUMBER: 143.92 CHANGE	: -0.34%

NO. OF TRADED SHARES IN PARALLEL MARKET : 208297
VALUE TRADED IN PARALLEL MARKET : 202512

Oman expects $390m of investments

ABU DHABI (AFP) — Private investment in Oman is expected to reach around 150 million Omani riyals ($390 million) in 1994 as it presses ahead with reforms to offset low oil prices, an official has said.

The bulk of investments are in new ventures and in subscription to institutions sold off by the government as part of a large-scale privatisation programme, said Mahmoud Al Jarwani, director of the Muscat Stock Exchange.

"The private sector used to survive on government spending but there has been a positive change," he told the United Arab Emirates daily Al Bayan. "For example, I expect private investment to reach around 150 million riyals this year. This is the first time such things are happening in the market."

Oman has sold five key public establishments and is planning to set up projects worht billions of dollars with the practicipation of the private sector as part of overall reforms to cushion the impact of weak oil prices.

Officials have said privatised units had been oversubscribed because of the large domestic liquidity and prosperous stock market in Oman. Liquidity was estimated at around 1.3 billion riyals ($3.38 billion) at the end of 1993.

The new projects include two electricity plants in Salalah and Minah, a sewage project in Muscat at a cost of $599 million, a similar project in Salalah at a cost of $130 million, $700 million petrochemical complex and $9 billion gas liquefaction plant.

Another ambitious project involves building a pipeline to supply natural gas to India at a cost of more than $5 billion.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf producers stung by weak oil prices are also planning to privatise some government facilities.

Mercedes, SMH to make Swatchmobile in France

BONN, Germany (R) — German industrial giant Daimler-Benz has said that its unit Mercedes-Benz and Switzerland's SMH would build a new, environmentally friendly car called Swatchmobile at Sarreguemines-Hambach in France.

Daimler said in a statement that STE Suisse Microelectronique et D'Horlogeries (SMH), run by "Swatch" watch inventor Nicolas Hayek, had also decided on the French location for the factory rather than a site in Germany.

The decision was widely expected. Both Mercedes and Daimler executives had hinted strongly that France would be the site, despite protests from German unions and politicians.

Mercedes chief executive Helmut Werner recently said France had lower wage and non-wage costs and that workers could work more days a year. Daimler Chairman Edzards Reuter added that in a united Europe, a decision could be purely economic and that France was a key market for the whole Daimler group.

SMH and Daimler recently formed the Micro Compact Car (MCC) venture to develop the Swatchmobile, a two-seater only 2.50 metres long designed for city use. It will be produced from 1997 in volumes of around 200,000 a year. MCC is 51 per cent Mercedes-owned while SMH holds the other 49 per cent.

Daimler said work on the new plant at Sarreguemines-Hambach in the Lorraine region would begin in the third quarter of 1995. Investment would total 750 million marks ($477 million), but it did not say how this would be divided between the two partners.

When the plant was working at full capacity it would employ 1,900 people. The car would generate a total of 9,000 jobs, primarily in Germany, where much of the development work and component building would take place. Mercedes said last week at least 3,900 jobs would be created in Germany.

The first car would roll off the production line late in 1997 and the model would be available in all major European markets by the spring of 1998 at a price well under 20,000 marks ($12,720).

"With the MCC we are defining a whole new market segment with enormous growth potential," Mr. Werner said.

"But this does not mean it will not have all the qualities one expects of a Mercedes. This vehicle fits completely with our product strategy," he added.

Mr. Hayek said the Swatchmobile would combine Mercedes qualities such as quality and safety with those of SMH which included a good relationship between price and performance and innovative design.

MCC has not yet decided on the power system for the Swatchmobile but is looking into alternatives such as a highly economical diesel, an electric motor or diesel-electric hybrid.

The heated debate in Germany which preceded the decision mirrored a similar situation last year when Mercedes had to decide where to build its new, small A-class city car.

Mercedes eventually decided to produce the A-class at its German Rastatt plant rather than in rival locations in Britain, France or the Czech Republic.

Mercedes hailed its own decision as a vote of confidence in the future of Germany as a production site. But in reality it wrested significant concessions from its domestic workforce on pay and conditions in exchange for making the car at home.

China convicts 941 of making fake goods

BEIJING (R) — Chinese courts have convicted 941 people over the past two years of manufacturing or selling counterfeit goods, including cigarettes, liquor, medicine and fertiliser, the Guangming daily said Friday.

Of the total, 12 were sentenced to death and 15 jailed for life, the newspaper quoted the State Bureau for Technology Supervision as saying.

Fake goods were virtually unheard of in Maoist China, when most items were rationed. But they have spread since the mid-1980s, following the introduction of economic reforms.

Authorities seized counterfeit goods with a face value of 5.18 billion yuan ($609.4 million) and destroyed items worth 1.56 billion yuan ($184 million), the newspaper said.

About 150 people were poisoned in western Sichuan and central Hubei and Henan provinces after drinking fake liquor, of whom 19 died, the newspaper said.

Fake fertiliser worth 208,000 yuan ($24,500) sold in Sichuan damaged 53,800 hectares (133,000 acres) of farmland, the newspaper said.

Financial Markets

Jordan Times in co-operation with Cairo Amman Bank

U.S. Dollar in International Markets

Currency	New York Close Date 23/12/94	Tokyo Close Date 23/12/94
Sterling Pound*	1,5468	1,5463
Deutsche Mark	1,5743	1,5793
Swiss Franc	1,3515	1,3529
French Franc	5,4405	5,4525
Japanese Yen	100,25	100,12
European Currency Unit	1,2090	1,2050

* USD Per STG
** European Opening @ 8.00 a.m. GMT

Eurocurrency Interest Rates Date: 23/12/94

Currency	1 MTH	3 MTHS	6 MTHS	12 MTHS
U.S. Dollar	5,75	6,06	6,56	7,06
Sterling Pound	5,68	6,12	6,66	7,25
Deutsche Mark	5,18	5,18	5,31	5,68
Swiss Franc	3,68	4,00	4,31	4,56
French Franc	5,63	6,00	6,38	6,88
Japanese Yen	2,18	2,18	2,31	2,43
European Currency Unit	6,00	6,25	6,50	6,93

Interbank bid rates for amounts exceeding U.S. Dollars 1,000,000 or equivalent

Precious Metals Date: 24/12/94.

Metal	USD/Oz	JD/Gm*	Metal	USD/Oz	JD/Gm
Gold	381,00	7,60	Silver	4,77	0,105

* 21 karat

Central Bank of Jordan Exchange Rate Bulletin Date: 24/12/94

Currency	Bid	Offer
U.S. Dollar	0,7030	0,7050
Sterling Pound	1,0859	1,0913
Deutsche Mark	0,4447	0,4469
Swiss Franc	0,5269	0,5295
French Franc	0,1288	0,1294
Japanese Yen*	0,7014	0,7049
Dutch Guilder	0,3973	0,3993
Swedish Krona	----	----
Italian Lira*	0,0428	0,0430
Belgian Franc	----	----

* Per 100

Other Currencies Date: 24/12/94

Currency	Bid	Offer
Bahraini Dinar	1,8490	1,8520
Lebanese Lira*	0,0415--	0,049620
Saudi Riyal	0,1860	0,1880
Kuwaiti Dinar	2,3000	2,3600
Qatari Riyal	0,1919	0,1938
Egyptian Pound	0,2000	0,2150
Omani Riyal	1,8070	1,8260
UAE Dirham	0,1908	0,1917
Greek Drachma*	0,2860	0,3200
Cyprus Pound	1,4050	1,4390

* Per 100

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U.S. endures hellish sport year

WASHINGTON (AFP) — In the United States, 1994 was the sports year from hell.

One of the most miserable periods in U.S. sports history included the fall of former hero O.J. Simpson, skater Tonya Harding involved in a plot to injure rival Nancy Kerrigan and a baseball labor dispute that killed the World Series.

The first-ever U.S. World Cup final brought record crowds, but also the doping disgrace of Argentine star Maradona. The FIFA-backed plan for a U.S. elite league failed to find financial support and was postponed until 1996, losing any boost the tournament might have brought.

The U.S. team reached the second round in large part because of an own goal by Colombia's Andres Escobar, who was killed in his homeland for his mistake.

National Hockey League (NHL) owners shut down their season rather than risk a player strike over their efforts to impose salary limits. National Basketball Association (NBA) owners considered a similar measure but struck a deal to play one more season under expired contract terms.

Martina Navratilova retired from tennis while Jennifer Capriati went through drug rehabilitation and played only at season's end. But nothing challenged Simpson as the year's most noted tragedy.

Simpson was a respected U.S. sports broadcaster and actor who parlayed a legendary National Football League career into fame and top-money endorsements.

But since Simpson was charged with two murders in the grisly June deaths of his ex-wife and another man, he has become a notorious figure. A lengthy trial process, most of it on television, will drag well into next year.

The starkest image came June 17 when Simpson was driving along a California highway trailed by police while television cameras followed the low-speed chase. World Cup openers and U.S. Open golf could not compete with the stuff of Greek tragedy.

The Simpson shocker drove Tonya and Nancy off the front pages after their tale of woe dominated attention for months. It began in January when Kerrigan was struck on the right knee with a metal baton after a practice session.

Harding went on to win the U.S. crown, but officials gave Kerrigan a berth at the Lillehammer Olympics if she could recover. While Kerrigan worked to regain top form, an investigation into the assault began to focus on Harding.

Harding's ex-husband and two others were eventually convicted for their part in a plot to injure Kerrigan. Harding pleaded guilty to lying about the plot when talking with authorities and was later barred from amateur skating.

Harding went to court and won the right to compete at the Winter Olympics alongside Kerrigan at the centre of a global media circus. Harding skated poorly while Kerrigan finished second to Oksana Baiul.

But Kerrigan was heard around the world criticising Baiul and was taped while complaining at a Disney World parade in her honor. Her whining drew little sympathy, as did that of other rich athletes.

The two longest work stoppages in U.S. sports history came because millionaire owners and players in baseball and ice hockey could not decide how to divide profits.

Baseball owners demanded players accept salary limits. Players instead walked out in protest August 12, shutting down the season at the point of greatest attention. One month later, acting commissioner Bud Selig and other owners called off the World Series, an unprecedented sacrifice over a labour dispute.

Two weeks after baseball's shutdown, NHL owners halted their season before it began over similar issues, increasing U.S. apathy over the game despite the New York Rangers winning their first Stanley Cup title since 1940.

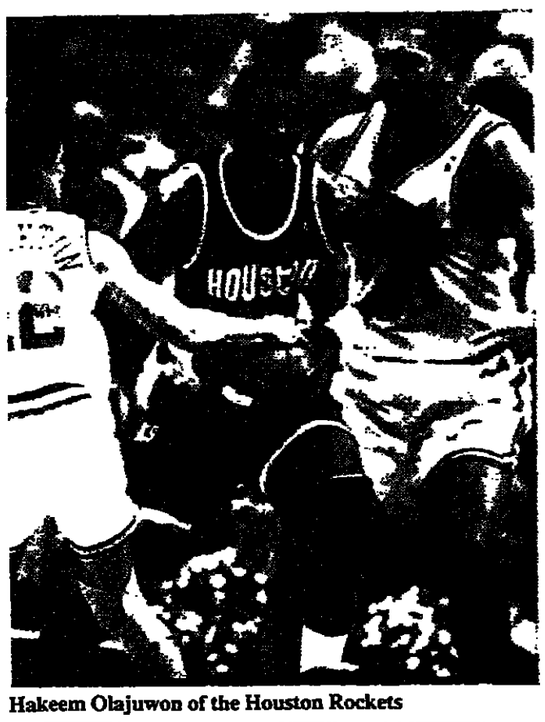
Even winners had problems. The Dallas Cowboys won their second straight National Football League title, but coach Jimmy Johnson was paid $2 million to depart in a dispute with owner Jerry Jones.

Nigerian-born Hakeem Olajuwon led Houston to the NBA title ove. New York in a seven-game final, but the season's defensive tone was criticised, as was the overwhelming gold-medal dominance by Dream Team II at the world championships.

Al Unser Jnr won the Indianapolis 500 and Indy-Car season title, while past champion Nigel Mansell struggled and headed back to Formula One. The series domination by Penske Racing pushed talk of a rival circuit

O.J. Simpson

Nancy Kerrigan



Hakeem Olajuwon of the Houston Rockets

Maradona to coach Argentina's Racing

BUENOS AIRES (R) — Diego Maradona signed a contract Friday to coach Racing Club, a once-great Argentine soccer side that has failed to win a championship for 28 years.

In Typical Maradona style the contract, for which he will reportedly get $500,000 a year, was signed in a Buenos Aires TV studio and broadcast live for all Argentines to behold

Maradona, 34, whose first coaching job ended earlier this month in disaster — Deportivo Mandiyu won only one out of 12 matches under his command — insisted he had the formula for success:

"Racing needs a touch of tactical discipline to be a champion. We want an aggressive team ... ready to give its all for the club's colours," the former Argentine great said

Maradona will start working for Racing who last won a tournament in 1968, on January

His wages have not been disclosed but the local press was rife with speculation that he would be getting $500,000.

In any case, he will not cost Racing a single cent, said club president Juan Distefano:

"All the money will be provided by a business group," he said without elaboration

Soon after the signing ceremony, Maradona was departing for Cuba to spend Christmas there by special invitation of president Fidel Castro

The star of Argentina's 1986 World Cup triumph has also hinted that he would also like to play for Racing

But first he would have to wait at least until September, when a 15-month won ban by the FIFA world soccer body for failing a drug test,

Al Hussein top standings going into 16th week

By Aleen Bannayan
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Al Faisali's clash with Al Ramtha at Amman Stadium is probably the most important match of the upcoming 16th week of the first division soccer championship which begins Sunday when Al Ahli face last-placed Al Jeel.

The other matches might not be as interesting for fans to watch, but as the competition draws nearer to its end, most teams cannot afford to lose more points, especially the last four threatened by relegation.

Following the 15th week, Al Hussein, Al Wihdat and Al Ramtha remained the top three only a point apart after defeating Al Jeel, Al Qadsieh, and Kufrsoum.

Al Faisali who beat Al Jazireh 2-0 remained in fourth and fifth places

Al Ahli moved up to sixth after a 4-0 win over Shabab Al Hussein, while Kufrsoum dropped to seventh after losing 3-2 to Al Ramtha.

Al Arabi moved out of the last four for now with a 3-0 win over 11th placed Al Karmel and Al Qadsieh moved back to 9th place. The last three remained unchanged.

Al Wihdat vs. Al Qadsieh: Although Al Wihdat's strikers had abundant chances to score, the former champions disappointed over 10,000 fans when they could not raise their scoring record which remained among the lowest for a top team at 17-3.

Jihad Abdul Mun'em scored the sole goal in the 53rd minute.

Al Faisali vs. Al Jazireh: The titleholders probably sensed that they had lost enough chances to take a clear lead in the championship if they want to retain their third consecutive title. They played a good match led by captain Jamal Abu Abed and backed by the return of the suspended Awad brothers, Mousa and Subhi.

Scorers: Jamal Abu Abed (3rd), and Jiryes Tadros (84th).

Al Ramtha vs. Kufrsoum: Although Kufrsoum's Yousef Obeidat stunned Al Ramtha when he scored two consecutive early goals in the 5th and 7th minutes, Al Ramtha demonstrated that their results this year were among the most consistent as striker Salim Diyabat scored their first goal in the eighth minute, before teammates Bilal Al Labham and Mouaffaq Abu Hdeib added the two winning goals late in the match in the 80th and 87th minutes.

Al Arabi vs. Al Karmel: Al Arabi temporarily moved out of the last four with an important win over Al Karmel who seem destined to be relegated.

Rakez Karasneh opened scoring for Al Arabi in the 3rd minute. Teammate Ayman Al Omari added the second goal in the 62nd minute and Mouaffaq Srour netted in the third goal in the final seconds of the match.

Al Hussein vs. Al Jeel: Leaders Al Hussein got away with a 3-2 win over last-placed Al Jeel thanks to the efforts of striker Aref Hussein who scored two goals and helped Munib Gharaibeh score the third. Raseen Diya upset the leaders when he scored both Al Jeel's goals but stopped short of scoring an equaliser.

Al Ahli vs. Shabab Al Hussein: Al Ahli finally delighted their fans and scored their first win in the second round crushing Shabab Al Hussein 4-0.

Nart Yadal scored twice for Al Ahli, Husam Hammoh netted another while Al Hussein's defender miscalculated a pass to his goalkeeper and added a fourth goal for Al Ahli who moved up to sixth.

Jordan Soccer League

Standings after 15th week

	P	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts.
Hussein	15	12	2	1	41	14	26
Wihdat	15	10	5	—	17	3	25
Ramtha	15	10	4	1	32	9	24
Faisali	15	7	6	2	24	8	20
Jazireh	15	7	3	5	19	16	17
Ahli	15	5	5	5	20	20	15
Kufrsoum	15	7	1	7	25	26	15
Arabi	15	5	3	7	18	26	13
Qadsieh	15	4	4	7	18	22	12
Shabab Al Hussein	15	1	3	11	17	36	5
Karmel	15	1	3	11	10	36	5
Jeel	15	1	1	13	10	35	3

Spurs down Rockets; Suns win again

PHOENIX (R) — Kevin Johnson celebrated his return to the starting lineup by scoring 21 points and handing out 11 assists as the Suns continued their home dominance with a 126-110 victory over the Denver Nuggets

All-Star Johnson, starting for the first time in 15 games since hurting his knee, helped the Suns' attack sing.

"We're getting pretty dangerous," said Phoenix coach Paul Westphal, whose team is 13-0 at home this season. "We're starting to figure it out a little bit."

All eight Suns who saw action scored in double figures as Pacific Division leading Phoenix improved to 19-6.

Phoenix led 81-67 with 5:52 left in third quarter wwhen the game was delayed 11 minutes due to clock troubles. Johnson scored six points during a 10-2 Suns' run following the delay.

During the halt, some Suns players tossed a small football around the arena, along with the gorilla, the team mascot.

"They were playing football during the break, that's ridiculous," Nuggets centre Dikembe Mutombo.

"I've never seen something like this in my life. I think the league needs to do something to punish these people who try to minimise the importance of the game. It's insulting to me for them to play around during a basketball game."

In San Antonio, Vinny Del Negro scored 17 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter and Sean Elliott added 19, including a 16-foot jumper with 2.9 seconds left, as the streaking Spurs beat the NBA champion Houston Rockets 98-96.

David Robinson added 18 points and made two key blocks on Hakeem Olajuwon in the final three seconds for the Spurs, who won their sixth straight game.

Vernon Maxwell scored 27 points to lead Houston.

John Starks of the NY Knicks flies into Michael Cage of the Cleveland Cavaliers before passing the ball during their Dec. 22 match (AFP photo)

In Orlando, Shaquille O'Neal scored 32 points to lead the Magic to their 11th home win without a loss, a 123-91 romp over the struggling Milwaukee Bucks.

O'Neal hit 12-of-18 from the field and made 8-of-12 from the line as Orlando improved their NBA-best record to 20-5. Milwaukee (7-17) lost their fourth straight loss.

In Cleveland, Tyrone Hill scored 18 points and grabbed 19 rebounds to help the surging Cavaliers win their eighth straight game 80-75 over the New Jersey Nets.

Hill hit 6-of-7 from the floor for the Central Division leading Cavaliers (17-8).

Kenny Anderson scored 18 points for New Jersey, which played without all-star forward Derrick Coleman for the third straight game due to an injured left hand.

In Chicago, Toni Kukoc scored 27 points, including 17 in the second quarter, to help the Bulls flatten the Indiana Pacers 116-92 and end a three-game losing streak.

Kukoc hit 11-of-15 from the floor for the Bulls, who avenged a 107-99 loss at Indiana Wednesday.

Scottie Pippen, returning to the starting lineup after missing Wednesday's game with the flu, played 33 minutes and scored 13 points with 11 rebounds and six steals. "I think me and Toni work well together on offence," said Steals." "I think me and Toni work well together on offence," said Pippen. "I think we create a lot of trouble for teams with mismatches."

In Portland, Clifford Robinson scored 14 of his 31 points in the first quarter as the Trail Blazers trampled the Dallas Mavericks 118-92. The Blazers raced out to a 12-2 lead in the opening minutes and were never seriously threatened.

"We had a good defensive effort tonight," said Robinson. Dallas was held to just 60 points after three quarters.

In Detroit, Mookie Blaylock had eight assists and scored 18 points to lead five players in double figures as the Atlanta Hawks downed the Detroit Pistons 97-77.

The victory ended a four-game road slide for Atlanta and brought coach Lenny Wilkens within one of tying Red Auerbach on the all-time victory list at 938.

In Miami, Glen Rice scored 37 points to lead the heat to a 116-93 rout of the Charlotte Hornets.

"It was our best effort all year," Rice said.

Results of NBA

Philadelphia	85	Boston	77
Miami	116	Charlotte	93
Orlando	123	Milwaukee	91
Cleveland	80	New Jersey	75
Atlanta	97	Detroit	77
San Antonio	98	Houston	96
Chicago	116	Indiana	92
Phoenix	126	Denver	110
Portland	118	Dallas	92
Washington	105	LA Clippers	102
LA Lakers	100	Sacramento	89

Yugoslavia lose on return to international arena

PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil (R) — Yugoslavia lost 2-0 to world champions Brazil Friday in their first match since they were thrown out of international soccer two years ago.

Yugoslavia, who can now call only on player from the republics of Serbia and Montenegro, appeared to be in no fit state for a match after disembarking at 2:30 a.m. on the morning of the game after a marathon Transatlantic journey.

When they took the field in searing heat, Corinthians striker Viola, who made a tremendous impact when he came on as a substitute in extra time of the World Cup final against Italy in Juy, opened the scoring in the 26th minute.

Full-back Branco scored the second in the 65th minute with a pile-driver free kick.

The Yugoslavs, with 10n foreign-based players in their starting line-up, were so leaden-footed that on several occasions their defence was outpaced by Branco, a player notoriously short of pace.

Milan striker Dejan Savicevic made only one notable contribution throughout the game with a 35th minute run in which he beat three Brazilian defenders, only to find at the end that he had nobody to cross to.

Brazil, with nine members of their World Cup squad in the time, played a controlled possession game well suited to the conditions.

They dominated the first half, with PSV Eindhoven's 18-year-old striker Ronaldo missing three clearcut chances. The goal was a gem, with Branco playing a one-two with Zinho and crossing to the far post for Viola to score with a header.

It was Viola's second goal for Brazil in eight appearances and a boost for a player who did not score in the Brazilian championship for two months.

The pattern continued in the second half, during which the exhausted Yugoslavs made five substitutions, and in the 65th minute Branco scored with a rifling, 30-metre left-foot free kick which bounced in off the crossbar.

It was the former Genoa and Porto player's ninth goal for his country. Full-back Jorginho and Ronaldo both had further efforts saved by goalkeeper Goran Pandurovic.

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TANNAH HIRSCH

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MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE MALE

Both vulnerable. West deals.

NORTH
♠ J 10 7 6
♥ A J 4 2
♦ A 6
♣ A 7 6

WEST
♠ Q 5 2
♥ K 10 8
♦ Q 10 8 4 3 2
♣ 3

EAST
♠ 8 3
♥ Q 9 6 5
♦ J
♣ J 10 9 8 5 2

SOUTH
♠ A K 9 4
♥ 7 3
♦ K 9 7 5
♣ K Q 4

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
Pass	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	1 ♥	Pass	3 NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening lead: ?

The Women's Board-a-Match team championship at the recent Fall North American Championships was won by a squad led by reigning world champion Juanita Chambers of Schenectady, N.Y. It was her 13th national title.

On this hand from the event, both North-South pairs reached a shaky three no trump contract. At neither table was the spade suit, in which 11 tricks were available with routine play, even mentioned.

Both Wests found declarer's weak underbelly, attacking with a heart. At one table the lead was the eight of hearts. Declarer followed low from dummy and, when East carelessly played the queen, ten tricks were there for the taking with the aid of a heart finesse—three spades, two hearts, two diamonds and three clubs.

At the other table, GeriAnne Klafter of Allentown, Pa., playing with Chambers, led the ten of hearts at trick one! That completely ruined declarer. Again the first trick was ducked and West continued with the king of hearts to the ace. But now when in with the queen of spades West returned the eight of hearts and East was able to bank the nine and queen of the suit to hold declarer to nine tricks.

An overtrick would matter little at rubber bridge. But at board-a-match scoring, it meant a clear win rather than a tie for the board.

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January 15, 1995

Donald Fehr (right), leader of the Major League Baseball Players Association Union, walks to a meeting with owner representatives on Dec. 23 (AFP photo)

Baseball Players Association vows to fight on

WASHINGTON (R) — Donald Fehr, the executive director of the embattled Major League Baseball Players Association, warned team owners against growing too attached to the salary cap they implemented early Friday morning.

"It's not over," said Fehr, speaking after the owners rejected the players' last offer, declared an impasse and implemented work conditions following a midnight deadline.

"We aren't even to half time yet in this battle."

The owners said Friday that the new system features higher minimum salaries within maximum payroll limits, revenue sharing and revised rules governing free agency.

Playe· with four and five years of experience would become free agents under the new rules, with their old club reserving the right to match offers, provided it had not released the player.

A total of 63 players, including top flight pitchers JAck McDowell, Kevin Appier, Ken Hill and Alex Fernandez, fall in this category.

Players with six or more years of Major League service would still be entitled to unrestricted free agency.

Fehr said the union is preparing to take legal steps to block implementation.

"Hopefully it can be done by Tuesday," he said about preparations to seek an injunction to prevent implementation and file a complaint with the national labour relations board.

New York Democrat Daniel Patrick Moynihan said he plans to introduce legislation in the Senate on January 4 to repeal baseball's antitrust exemption.

"I believe the owners will regret this," said union assistant counsel Gene Orza. "This has been planned for two and one half years."

The players struck on August 12 in response to the owners' June 14 new economic proposals, including a salary cap. The shutdown cost post season play and cancelled the World Series for the first time since 1904.

Man. United's Ferguson *slams fixture-planners*

LONDON (AFP) — As English football prepares for its busiest period of the year with four games in eight days, Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson has criticised those who plan the fixtures over the holiday period.

With most Premiership games kicking off three hours earlier than normal, Ferguson, who takes his side to Chelsea Monday, is annoyed that the fans are being made to suffer.

Ferguson said: "There are plenty of clubs in the north, but instead of going to places within easy reach like Liverpool, Everton or Manchester City, our fans have to get to London and Southampton.

"You would think the planners would take distance into account at times like this."

It is an important game for Chelsea badly needing a boost after dismal run of two wins in 11 games with only one goal in their last five outings.

Chelsea wait on fitness tests for skipper Dennis Wise and defender Frank Sinclair, while United should have England centre-back Gary Pallister fit after a groin problem. Ryan Giggs is set to play with a lightweight protective plaster on his wrist after breaking a bone last Saturday.

Premiership leaders Blackburn, though, will not have far to travel as they visit Manchester City with a two-point lead over United at the top of the table after a run of seven wins in their last eight League games.

Manager Kenny Dalglish stayed away from training with a stomach bug on Friday, but Rovers will welcome back defender Colin Hendry from international duty.

England midfielder Paul Bracewell is set to start his first Premiership game of the season as third-placed Newcastle travel to Leeds.

Bracewell, who has had five groin operations this year, has been on the bench for Newcastle's last two games.

England central defender Steve 'Howey, who missed the League Cup defeat by Manchester City in midweek because of illness, and England midfielder Robert Lee are also back in contention.

Brian Deane starts a two-match suspension but Leeds have skipper Gary McAllister back from international duty with Scotland.

Manager Howard Wilkinson is usually reluctant to change a winning side but McAllister is certain to regain

missing the 3-1 win at Arsenal.

With Deane out, South African Phil Masinga is set to continue in the attack after his two goals at Highbury.

Nottingham Forest may welcome back defender Colin Cooper who has missed three matches with an ankle injury with Norwegian Alf Inge Haaland likely to make way.

Dutch striker Bryan Roy has a groin injury and manager Frank Clark has put Jason Lee on standby as Forest look to build on last week's 2-1 at Old Trafford.

Guy Whittingham, will make his debut for Sheffield Wednesday at Everton following his £750,000 move from Aston Villa in midweek.

But Wednesday have doubts about Andy Sinton, who missed last week's defeat by QPR match with a thigh injury.

Everton, who last week established a club record of going over 11 hours without conceding a goal, welcome back £4 million striker Duncan Ferguson from Scotland duty.

Whittingham was part-exchanged for Ian Taylor who will make his Villa debut in his preferred central midfield role at Arsenal.

Villa's failure to deliver goals this season is a problem that Little hopes Taylor, who scored 35 in two seasons with Port Vale, will help to solve.

Taylor, could replace Kevin Richardson, but Republic of Ireland skipper Andy Townsend is also be back in contention after completing a six-match suspension.

Coventry striker Dion Dublin has had a painkilling injection in a bid to play against Nottingham Forest at Highfield Road.

Dublin, scorer of 10 goals in 14 games, has missed three matches after tearing a stomach muscle but though he has recovered from that, the £2 million player now has a groin strain.

German striker Jurgen Klinsmann, back from international duty, is set to return for Spurs who travel oto Norwich and will be having his first experience of football over the Christmas period.

Klinsmann said: "It will seem a bit strange, but that is the way of things in the English league and as a professional I must go along with it."

Norwich City manager John Deehan will be forced to reshuffle his midfield as Mike Milligan starts a two match suspension with Jeremy Goss set to make a

MEN'S TENNIS 1994

Sampras and Agassi come out top in 'crisis' season

PARIS (AFP) — Pete Sampras, despite a thigh injury which prevented the United States reaching the Davis Cup final, continued to dominate men's tennis throughout 1994 while Andre Agassi at last put his act together long enough to emerge as his most likely challenger.

It was what everybody wanted after a nervous season played against a backdrop of crisis reports on the declining state of the game, and often inappropriate counter-measures by panic-stricken administrators.

Whether the Sampras-Agassi rivalry blossoms to compare with the legendary confrontations of the Bjorn Borg, John McEnroe, Jimmy Connors and Ivan Lendl era, remains to be seen.

But it will certainly do the game no harm.

Sampras, 23, a stylish serve-and-volleyer currently leads the series against the world's finest returner of serve. But Agassi's flamboyant baseline retrieving and blistering groundstrokes have already turned some of their showdowns into classics.

Sampras, who took over as world number-one from Jim Courier in April 1993, won ten of the 17 ATP tournaments he entered and swelled his total of Grand Slam titles to five by winning the Australian Open and retaining his Wimbledon crown.

He looked unstoppable until niggling injuries broke his rhythm after his Wimbledon triumph, and his blackest moment came in Gothenburg when he limped off after one set of his vital reverse singles against Stefan Edberg in the Davis Cup semi-final.

The stoppage cost the United States, who had led 2-0 after the first day, their place in the final.

But by the end of the year he was back in full flow capturing the ATP Championship and then reaching the final at the Grand Slam Cup. In all he won 74 of his 85 matches.

Agassi, 24, started the year with his wrist in plaster and a warning from doctors that he might never play again. It was a sobering prospect for a player who, despite his 1992 Wimbledon victory, had never really lived up to his potential.

when he returned to the tour in late February, he had a new girlfriend in model Brook Shields and a new, more positive attitude to his profession. He confounded the experts by winning his first tournament after the three month lay-off at Scottsdale and three weeks later reached the final at Key Biscayne.

Although Agassi was too match rusty to peak at the French Open or Wimbledon, he was at his best winning his second career Grand Slam title at the U.S. Open.

He also triumphed at the Paris Indoor in November to reach second in the rankings for the first time, and went on to reach the ATP World Championship semi-finals in Frankfurt and the Grand Slam Cup quarter-finals in Munich.

Yevgeny Kafelnikov emerged as the season's most exciting newcomer — charging up the rankings from outside the top-100 to 1th, winning three tournaments and leading Russia to a first-ever Davis Cup final.

It was a magnificent achievement by the 20-year-old and although the Cup went to Sweden after a 4-1 victory in Moscow — the scoreline was deceptive. Both of the opening singles and the doubles went to five sets and if the Russians were beaten it was because of their inexperience when it came to playing the big points in front of a partisan crowd.

Kafelnikov, who had won all of his previous singles matches in the competition against Australia, the Czech Republic and Germany, for once failed to produce the goods.

He lost his opening rubber against Swedish number-two Magnus Larsson.

Earlier, compatriot Alexander Volkov lost his concentration against Stefan Edberg after President Boris Yeltsin held up play for several minutes while staging a dramatic entrance with the score at 5-5 in the fifth set.

Sweden clinched their victory in the doubles when their newly-crowned world champions, Jan Apell and Jonas Bjorkman, beat Kafelnikov and Andrei Olhovskiy in another five-set marathon.

The Swedish victory was a tremendous reward for the declining Stefan Edberg and retiring captain John-Anders Sjogren.

Edberg, who will be 29 next month, won three titles in an up and down season, but for the first time in eight years he failed to reach a Grand Slam final and finished down in seventh place in the rankings.

Larsson, like Kafelnikov, was another major revelation.

The 24-year-old first hit the headlines by reaching the French Open semi-finals, and although he went through a difficult period — crashing to a series of early round defeats — he surged back by following his Davis Cup success with victory in the Grand Slam Cup, where his victims included both Agassi and Sampras.

A new slimmed-down Boris Becker, apparently thriving under his unlikely association with American coach Nick Bollettieri, returned to winning ways and moved up to third spot in the rankings.

The 27-year-old German, who was being written off in 1993f, won four titles. He also reached the semi-finals at Wimbledon, the final of the ATP Championships and the quarter-finals of the Grand Slam Cup and showed that he will be a force to be reckoned with again in 1995.

Croatia's volatile Goran Ivanisevic found that a record 1,169 aces in a season was not enough to bring him either his first Grand Slam title or put him on top of the rankings — although he came close, reaching the Wimbledon final for a second time and rising to number-two in the rankings.

Spanish tennis enjoyed a magnificent season.

Sergi Bruguera retained his French Open crown by beating unorthodox compatriot Alberto Berasategui in the Roland Garros final and both players qualified for the end-of-season ATP finals.

Bruguera showed his new, much-improved form on faster and indoor surfaces by reaching the semi-finals, while Berasategui produced a tremendous late season run of successes on South American clay courts.

In all Spanish players won 14 ATP events.

Michael Chang, the smallest player in the 'top-ten' at 5ft 9in, continued to hold his own. He won six titles and triumphed at Jakarta and Hong Kong without losing a set.

There was disappointment for Andrei Medvedev, Jim Courier and Michael Stich, while veteran Ivan Lendl finished the year by announcing his retirement.

Medvedev, hailed as a potential world champion in 1993, started superbly and, at 19, became the ATP's youngest title winner at the Monte Carlo Open. However, injuries forced him to put his Grand Slam ambitions on ice.

Courier's big-hitting baseline game had clearly become too predictable, and the winner of two Australian and two French Opens failed to win a single event in 1994. By the end of the year, he had slumped to 13th in the rankings.

Michael Stich, who led Germany to Davis Cup glory in 1993 and who soared to number two in the world, lurched from disaster to disaster in 1994 — being beaten in the Wimbledon first round by American outsider Bryan Shelton.

Death threats certainly didn't help during Germany's shock home semi-final Davis Cup defeat against Russia, but they were not the sole reason for Stich's complete loss of form.

He was beaten in both the singles and lost the doubles. As his decline continued, there was more humiliation for the 1991 Wimbledon champion when he failed to qualify for the ATP finals.

Veteran Lendl, 34, suffered recurring injuries — the price for the years of dedication and relentless practice he put in when he was the dominant force in world tennis.

He finished the year down in 54th place and announced that a back injury was forcing him to retire from the game he loved.

Tennis was badly shaken from reports that the game had become 'boring.' Dwindling interest and empty seats were blamed on power tennis, too few rallies and a lack of 'characters.'

The old argument that players should be limited to only one serve was given an airing, and there were suggestions tht court lines be retraced to make the service square smaller and that balls be made softer.

To appease television there were moves to reduce the time between points from 25 to 20 seconds, and the rules for the ATP Championships were changed to allow late substitutions at the 'round-robin' stage.

Both measures caused an outcry.

The 'substitution' rule was condemned and the ATP accused of putting tennis on a par with professional wrestling. Their new rule, it was claimed, could lead to a player, who had not been good enough to qualify, winning the event while playing fewer matches than his opponents.

The move to reduce the time-limit between points angered many players who threatened to boycott events if the new limit was imposed.

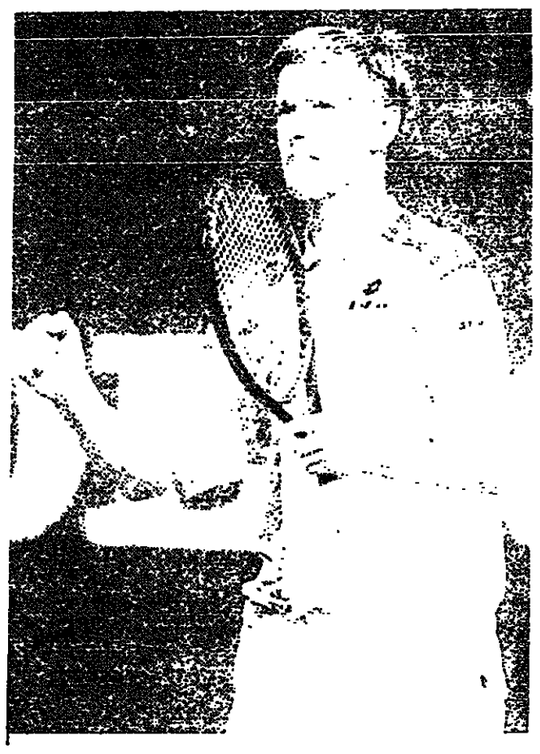
"Indoors 20 seconds is good. But not outside," said Agassi, adding that given the climatic conditions in places like Melbourne, the new rule was "a disaster waiting to happen."

"If they want to speed up the game a little bith than they should speed up the changeover time," he said.

Becker best summed up the undignified scramble to change the rules by saying: "I don't understand all the fuss. I don't think tennis has a problem, but if it has it is overexposure."

Pete Sampras

Andre Agassi



Yevgeny Kafelnikov

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NEWS IN BRIEF

Gaza journalists strike over Israeli ban

GAZ CITY (AFP) — The Association of Palestinian Journalists in Gaza announced a one-day strike Saturday to protest Israel's refusal to allow its members into the Jewish state. The protest was the second to be launched by the 160-member association here. It only affected journalists working in the self-rule Gaza Strip. The association had urged a ban on Israeli journalists entering Gaza earlier this month, but the Palestinian Authority did not take any measures against them. "We journalists announce a strike on Dec. 24 in protest and as a warning to all the enemies of peace," said a statement released by the association. "We call on all foreign journalists in Israel and in the self-rule areas to condemn these measures. We are confident our authority will not agree to let Israeli journalists come to the autonomous areas while we are banned (from Israel)," it said. A senior Palestinian official told reporters he had been in contact with Israel over the issue.

Norway releases hijacker wanted by Germany

OSLO (AFP) — A Palestinian hijacker, Soraya Ansari, has been released from a Norwegian jail on humanitarian grounds despite an outstanding extradition order for her from Germany, judicial sources here said Saturday. A court in Eidsdvating decided to free Ms. Ansari on Friday night. Her lawyers had argued that she was in poor physical and mental health and that it was unduly harsh to separate her from her nine-year-old daughter. A government spokesman told AFP that the matter was not over because the Norwegian government still had to take a final decision on Germany's request for her extradtion. Germany has demanded Ms. Ansari's return to stand trial for her part in the 1977 hijacking of a Lufthansa airliner to Mogadishu, Somalia in a bid to free 11 imprisoned members of the extreme-left Red Army Faction and two members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Ms. Ansari, now 41, is the only member of the commando to have survived. The other three hijackers were killed along with the plane's captain. Arrested and sentenced to 20 years jail by the Somali authorities, Ms. Ansari was freed after serving only one year. She arrived in Norway in 1991 from Cyprus and was not accused of any criminal activities in Scandinavia before she was arrested by Norwegian police last Oct. 13 on a request from Interpol acting on behalf of the German authorities. An Oslo criminal court decided on Dec. 15 that she could be extradited to Germany. Ms. Ansari lodged an appeal but the Norwegian supreme court is not due to hear it until January at the earliest.

Major reassures Falklands in message

PORT STANLEY (R) — Prime Minister John Major reassured Falkland Islanders on Saturday, saying London would defend their rights to be British and supporting British oil companies that want to explore around the disputed islands. Britain and Argentina fought a war in 1982 over the islands in the South Atlantic, which Argentina calls the Malvinas, and the two nations are negotiating over oil rights in the area. "(Britain) will continue to uphold the rights of (Falkland) islanders to be governed under the flag of your own choice," Mr. Major said in a Christmas address on BBC Radio. "Significant oil finds will underpin your economic future. We will help by passing on the lessons we've learnt in exploiting the resources of the North Sea." Referring to the negotiations, which have included talk of a joint venture between British and Argentine oil companies, Mr. Major said: "Between us we should look for a way of carrying forward this oil exploration without creating unavoidable difficulties with Argentina." Argentina has threatened to sue oil companies that search for fuel in Falkland waters without permission. Referring to opinion polls that show an overwhelming majority of the 2,200 Falkland Islanders want to remain British, Mr. Major said: "The very strong feelings you have on this subject were made clear and let me assure you that our feelings are no less firm."

Patients of British AIDS surgeon warned

GLASGOW, Scotland (R) — Scottish medical officials on Saturday started tracking down patients who may have been exposed to the HIV virus by a surgeon who has tested positive for the infection which causes AIDS. They reported a hotline for anxious patients was jammed with calls just hours after the doctor's name was released. George Browning, a leading ear specialist, agreed to be named publicly so as to narrow down the list of past patients who may need reassurance, the Greater Glasgow Health Board said. Dr. Browning learned he was HIV-positive earlier this week, they said. "With such a tumultuous effect on his own situation, I think this decision was a remarkably quick and courageous one," said Dr. David Goldberg, who was helping to track down patients. Health board officials emphasised that in similar cases worldwide there had not been one recorded instance of a patient being infected by a surgeon. In the United States an estimated 19,000 patients had been exposed to HIV-positive doctors or nurses with no recorded cases of infection. Several patients of a Florida dentist were found to be infected after he died of AIDS, although whether he infected them has been disputed. In line with British guidelines, Dr. Browning will not be able to operate on patients but will be able to continue consulting with them and teaching.

AIDS carrier jailed for biting policeman

SINGAPORE (AFP) — An AIDS carrier was jailed by a Singapore court for biting a policeman while resisting arrest, but was spared caning and attempted murder charges, news reports said Saturday. The 24-year-old man, infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in jail for causing hurt to the policeman and another three years for drug possession and consumption, the reports said. The man escaped a charge of attempted murder because the policeman was found to be HIV- negative. HIV, which causes the deadly acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), is transmitted through blood or other body fluids. Judge Syed Alwee said the man would not be caned because a medical report said that caning would damage his immune system. The report also said the man, who bit the policeman's hand while being handcuffed for drug possession, would have only three to six years of good health. The Maximum punishment for causing hurt is five years jail, a fine and caning.

Blast kills 11 Indian soldiers in Kashmir

JAMMU (AFP) — Eleven Indian soldiers were killed Saturday when a mine suspected to have been planted by separatist guerrillas blew up two army vehicles in the disputed Kashmir region, police and witnesses said. At least 15 soldiers were injured in the blast, which occurred in Kashmir's Poonch district on India's border with Pakistan, the police said in Jammu, winter capital of Kashmir. An army spokesman confirmed only nine deaths, but witnesses said the blast wrecked two vehicles and killed 11 soldiers driving to another Kashmir frontier zone. The land mine was triggered by a remote control device, police said, adding that the attack was the deadliest by Kashmiri militants on Indian troops in the militarised sector. It came a day after guerrillas fired a rocket at the headquarters of state-run Indian radio in the strife-torn Kashmir valley. No one was injured in Friday's rocket attack on the heavily-guarded All India Radio complex in Srinagar, the summer capital of Kashmir state, officials said. More than 10,000 people have died in Kashmir since 1989, when Muslim militants launched violent campaign for an end to Indian rule.

هكذا من الأصل

Fire guts Amman store; no casualties

AMMAN (J.T.) — A huge fire on Saturday engulfed a shoe store in the Jabal Hussein area, causing extensive damage to the store contents but no injuries.

Captain Farid Share', director of the public relations department at the Civil Defence Department (CDD), told the Jordan Times that the fire started at the basement of the three-storey store of 250 square metres.

It took firefighters one and a half hours to control and extinguish the fire and prevent it from spreading to the upper floors and neighbouring stores, Captain Share' said.

He said investigations were underway to determine the causes of the fire although preliminary indications point to a possible electric fault or a heater that was inside the basement at the time of the fire as having ignited the blaze.

Captain Share' could not give an estimate of the losses. The basement was full of leather and plastic shoes, he noted, adding that the investigations into the case were not yet over.

Colonel Mahmoud Abbadi from the CDD told Jordan Television that the shoe store, called Andalusia Store, contained huge amounts of shoes which easily catch fire.

He said the CDD team had difficulty in controlling the fire because of the narrow entrance to the building which is located at a very busy street.

Civil defence teams at work at the scene of Sunday's fire (photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Six more die in Bahrain clashes — opposition

TEHRAN (Agencies) — Six Shiite Muslim demonstrators who were wounded in clashes security forces in Bahrain earlier this week have died in hospital, a Bahraini opposition group said Saturday.

The banned Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB) said in a statement that the bodies were still at Salmanieh hospital in the Bahraini capital of Manama.

The group said Tuesday that five demonstrators and four members of the security forces had died in the clashes, which erupted December 12 and peaked last week-end.

The Bahraini authorities only reported the death of one policeman in the violence which erupted after the arrest of Shiite cleric Sheikh Ali Salman after he called for the restoration of parliament, suspended since 1975.

According to newspaper reports here, "angry crowds poured into the streets throughout Bahrain on Friday to commemorate the martyrs of the uprising."

The demonstrators "converged" at Jad-Hafas and Sanabes, where two of the demonstrators who had been killed by security forces were buried.

It was the worst violence in Bahrain since it became independent in 1975.

Dozens of Bahraini theology students in the Iranian holy city of Qom staged a protest on campus against the crackdown on Shiite Muslim demonstrators in Bahrain, newspapers reported.

The protesters, students at the Shiite school of theology in the southern city, condemned the "killing of innocent Muslims" in Bahrain and demanded free elections as well as the "immediate release" of all those arrested.

Chanting Allahu Akbar and denouncing the United States, the students also called on their government not to establish ties with Israel, the papers said.

Meanwhile, the Bahraini mission in Tehran confirmed that Manama had recalled its ambassador here.

The official Gulf News Agency, in Manama reported Friday that Sami Khalil Al Moayed had been recalled for "consultations."

According to witnesses in Bahrain contacted by AFP in Cyprus, armed police stood guard in Shiite Muslim-dominated districts and villages on Friday where violence had erupted during the protests.

Sheikh Ali was arrested on Dec. 5 after calling for the restoration of parliament. He had returned to Bahrain two years ago from Iran where he had been studying at the theological college in Qom.

The Bahraini government last Sunday blamed the clashes on a foreign-inspired plot, without naming the country behind it.

A top religious organisation in Iran Wednesday condemned Bahrain's "suppression" of the protests.

Majma-e-Jahani-e-Ahlebeit, an organisation made up of powerful clergy and close to Iranian leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said Bahrain's Sunni Muslim rulers should "listen to the Muslim protesters who demand a just political and social structure."

The daily Tehran Times said the clashes resulted from a "homespun protest against an oligarchy which has no respect for the will of the people."

Iran used to claim Bahrain as its 14th province before its independence, and many Bahraini Shiites have close ties with Iran, a Shiite Muslim country.

Bahraini authorities say Shiites make up 35 per cent of the population, but independent sources have put the figure at between 55 and 60 per cent.

Israel has new hopes for advancing Syria talks

TEL AVIV (R) — Israel, admitting it is "hurting greatly" from guerrilla assaults in Lebanon and vowing fresh counterblows, said on Saturday it sees the prospect of significant talks with key player Syria on security issues.

Defence Minister Mordechai Gur said Israel would "find the means to strike" at Hizbollah to restore quiet to its last combat-torn border, where 21 Israeli soldiers have been killed this year, six of them in intense fighting this month.

"We are suffering blows, and we are hurting greatly," Mr. Gur told Army radio. "We don't deny this, we're not hiding it."

In an apparent reference to Syria, main power-broker in Lebanon with 35,000 troops There, Mr. Gur said: "We will also find ways to reach more atttentive diplomatic ears."

Chief negotiator with Syria Itamar Rabinovich said talks in Washington this week, beefed up by military experts of both sides, held new hope of movement in negotiations deadlocked for years over an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

"It's possible to discuss security arrangements without drawing lines on maps," Mr. Rabinovich said. "You can hold very, very significant talks and reach an understanding on security arrangements without tying this to question of withdrawal."

Mr. Rabinovich, Israel's ambassador to Washington, rejected as counter-productive right-wing Israeli opposition calls to break off talks unless Damascus reined in Hizbollah.

He told the radio the events in Lebanon were "part of the picture" of Israeli-Syrian talks. "The talks with Syria will not be completed before a solution is found also for Israel's security problems in and from South Lebanon."

Syria says it will settle for no less than full return of the Golan. Israel has refrained from specifying the pullout it foresees, insisting Damascus must first specify the terms of the peace it envisions.

Lebanese-Israeli talks have gone nowhere since they began in 1991. Beirut, which closely coordinates its negotiating posture with Syria, demands Israel pull all its troops from the south.

Mr. Gur, a former army chief, said "only diplomatic agreements can put an end to this type of guerrilla and terrorist warfare."

Hizbollah fighters killed two Israeli soldiers and wounded seven in an assault on outposts in the zone on Friday. The group boasted it held the initiative against Israeli troops there.

Israel retaliated with shelling and air strikes, in which two Lebanese policemen were killed by helicopter fire.

A U.S. official said Friday private contacts between Syrian and Israeli military officials confirm that the sides want to reach a peace agreement, with security guarantees the key to such an accord.

Asked about reports that Syrian and Israeli officials were meeting in the U.S. capital, a U.S. official said, "I won't deny it."

President Bill Clinton's administration and Israeli and Syrian diplomats posted to Washington have been tight-lipped about the discussions. The Israeli media has reported that the Israeli delegation is headed by the Israeli chief of staff, Lieutenant General Ehud Barak.

The U.S. official told AFP privately that "there was a consensus" reached during Secretary of State Warren Christopher's trip to the Middle East in early December to restart talks at the intermediate level.

Syria later got cold feet, delaying the start of the discussions, the official said.

"The secretary got it back on track," the official added. "The parties are very serious."

There have been no high level talks between Israel and Syria since February. But Ambassador Rabinovitch, and Syria's Ambassador Walid Mouallen have kept up informal contacts, diplomatic sources said.

Israel and Syria have also exchanged proposals through Mr. Christopher, who has travelled to the Middle East seven times this year.

U.N. troops open fire on Somalis; roadblocks appear

MOGADISHU (R) — Bangladeshi U.N. peacekeepers fired into a Somali crowd baying at the gates of the U.N.-controlled seaport in Mogadishu on Saturday, wounding two, a U.N. military spokesman said.

Major Zubair Chattha said the Bangladeshis wounded the two Somalis as they attempted to fire "warning shots" to disperse the crowd.

Somalis have long been able to infiltrate U.N. bases, either crawling through razor wire fences, stealing passes or buying them off corrupt peacekeeping officers.

But there is a mounting frenzy as thousands of U.N. troops pull out of Somalia at the end of their failed mission before March 31, taking with them the military hardware, vehicles and food that the Somali militias covet so much.

On Friday, U.N. soldiers shot a Somali man in the stomach as he tried to pick up food left by Indian peacekeepers who completed the withdrawal of their 5,000-strong contingent.

He and the two wounded men from Saturday's incident at the port are being treated in the Egyptian military hospital.

Somali gunmen angry at losing their jobs as house guards barricades approaches to the airport with the smashed hulks of old cars and large rocks on Saturday, preventing U.N. staff from retreating to the airport.

Some 400 guards were employed at 15 U.N. houses for the last two years. They have often used their guns to threaten their own employers, extorting more money from them which they were readily given.

But now the $1.5 billion-a-year operation is closing down, leaving thousands of bewildered Somali youth without jobs in an economy that collapsed when the country broke apart in clan feuds four years ago.

Roadblocks were lifted later in the day after hours of discussions between the gunmen and U.N. officials. It was not clear if any money changed hands.

Up to 4,000 U.S. Marines, possibly backed by the AC-130 Spectre gunships that blitzed Mogadishu last year in a bid to break the power of warlord Mohammad Farah Aideed, plus Italian troops will be deployed to cover the last days of the U.N. withdrawal in February.

Fears are that clan militias that have revived many of their feuds as the U.N. departs will try to plunder the peacekeepers to resupply their arsenals and fleets of vehicles.

Arab League in new bid to heal rift

CAIRO (AFP) — Arab League chief Esmat Abdul Meguid will visit Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in early January in a new bid to heal divisions in the Arab World created by the 1990-1991 Gulf crisis, league officials said Saturday.

Secretary-General Abdul Meguid will urge Arab leaders to "put behind them" the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

He will also tell them that "the Arabs must close ranks now more than ever, because their lack of solidarity will affect them greatly," the official added, asking not to be named.

Most Arab countries supported the Cairo-based Arab League's bid to secure a reconciliation in time for the organisation's 50th anniversary on March 22, the official said.

Past reconciliation attempts have stumbled over the refusal of Gulf monarchies — notably Kuwait and Saudi Arabia — to deal with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

Clinton maintains Libyan sanctions for another year

WASHINGTON (Agencies) — President Bill Clinton on Friday extended for another year a comprehensive financial and trade embargo against Libya in effect since 1986.

"Under these sanctions, all trade with Libya is controlled by the Department of the Treasury, and all assets owned or controlled by the Libyan government in the United States or in possession of United States persons are frozen," a White House statement said.

It said the United States believes that even stronger U.N. Security Council sanctions should be enacted against Libya if it continues to defy the international community.

Libya has refused to turn over two men suspected in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland on Dec. 21, 1988 that killed 270 people.

The United States and Britain had charged in 1991 that two Libyan agents were responsible for the bombing in a plot allegedly orchestrated by their government's intelligence service.

The United Nations imposed sanctions on Libya to force the country to surrender the suspects. The United States recently rejected a Libyan proposal to have them International Court of Justice at the Hague.

The White House statement vowed to continue U.S. efforts to ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice, saying the families of the victims deserve nothing less.

The United States originally imposed sanctions on Libya in 1986 after accusing Libya of involvement in December 1985 guerrilla attacks at Vienna and Rome airports that killed 19 people.

The Department of State on Friday issued also a travel warning for Libya.

"The United States Department of State warns all U.S. citizens to avoid travel to Libya and to depart the country immediately if resident or visitor there, a department statement said.

"The U.S. government has determined that due to Libya's long history of flouting international law and directing terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens, it is unsafe for Americans to travel there.

"U.S. passports are not valid for travel to, in or through Libya unless a special validation is obtained from the Department of State.

"All financial and commercial transactions with Libya are prohibited, unless licensed by the U.S. Treasury

COLUMN

Gospel was 'eyewitness record' of Christ's life

LONDON (R) — A German scholar has found the first material evidence that the Gospel according to St. Matthew was an eyewitness account written by contemporaries of Jesus Christ, the Times newspaper reported Saturday. The newspaper said the evidence was a potentially important breakthrough in Biblical scholarship on a par with the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947. St. Matthew's Gospel was generally thought to have been written in the late second century. But after examining the writing style of three scraps of the Gospel in the library of Oxford University's Magdalen College, German papyrologist Carsten Thiede believes it was written a generation after Christ's crucifixion, or even earlier.

"The Magdalen fragment now appears to belong to a style of handwriting that was current in the first century BC and slowly petered out around the first-century AD," Mr. Thiede told the Times. "Even a hesitant approach to questions of dating would therefore seem to justify a date in the first century, about a hundred years earlier than was previously thought." The Times said the claim, which Mr. Thiede will publish in a specialist German journal next month, was likely to produce fierce controversy among Biblical scholars. Professor Peter Parsons, an Oxford papyrologist, called Mr. Thiede's argument "sloppy" and said it was based on wrong assumptions.

U.N. settles sex discrimination case

UNITED NATIONS (R) — The United Nations said Friday it had settled one of its most protracted sex discrimination cases, awarding American Catherine Claxton $94,000. In addition, she will be reimbursed $110,300 for legal fees and $6,500 for costs in the case she brought against Luis Maria Gomez, an Argentine official, who was second in command in the U.N. Development Programme (UNDP) before he resigned. Technically, the deal worked out with Ms. Claxton means she receives the money as compensation for the "prolonged and complex nature of the proceedings that led to the resolution of her case," a U.N. announcement said. The settlement also provides that Ms. Claxton, an office worker, can appeal a decision concerning her job classification at the United Nations without liability. But U.N. sources said the settlement does not cover her suit in a New York state court against Mr. Gomez personally, where she is seeking $2 million in damages. Ms. Claxton, in still secret papers, charged three years ago that in 1988, Mr. Gomez shut the door to his office, grabbed and kissed her, and in another incident in a routine meeting, began to make sexual remarks. In late 1992, Secretary-General Boutros Ghali for the first time created an outside tribunal, appointing Mella Carroll, a former justice of Ireland's Supreme Court. Judge Carroll ruled last January that there was clear evidence Ms. Claxton had been sexually assaulted.

Imperial eagle replaces hammer and sickle

MOSCOW (AFP) — Christmas tree decorations in Russia this year are no longer ideological weapons as in Soviet times. The coloured balls on the family trees now depict snow-covered Orthodox churches, or the two-headed eagle of the tsars, replacing communism's hammers and sickles. "Nobody wants to buy the old Communist symbols any more," said Mikhail Sverdlik, manager of Inei, Russia's sole manufacturer of Yuletide decorations. He has converted the factory's production-lines to turn out baubles with traditional countryside scenes and views of Moscow and the Kremlin. The 600 workers, mostly women, make the decorations by hand for households from Vladivostok to Mur